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BLONDEL PARVA.

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BLONDEL PARVA.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,"
ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BLONDEL PARVA.

CHAPTER I.

A CLOUD WITHOUT A SILVER LINING.

THAT the sword is always suspended over human life by the horse-hair, is an awful fact, but one that by no means impresses us like life's liability to sudden change. When the blade descends, all is over : sorrow itself is sheared away. Whereas the (so-called) lesser evils that menace our existence numb us with their pain perhaps for a moment, then leave us with full power to feel. The slightest accident—a blow or a fall on the spine, for instance—may render the strongest man a cripple for life, and paralyse his every limb. A piece of grit blown by the wind

into the eye, may shut out the face of nature from its lover for ever; nay, may make the most diligent toiler a useless piece of human lumber, and compel his little ones to beg the bread he can no longer win. The earthquake's shock is not more frightful to the thick-peopled city than are these strokes of unlooked doom to the individual; and they occur every day. But the most terrible change to which life is subject is, without doubt, a moral one—that of from Integrity to Crime.

Imagine a man, prosperous, intelligent, sensitive, beloved, but of a hasty temper, who, in a sudden access of passion, strikes his neighbour dead at his feet. This is a mischance—the provocation being sharp and sudden enough, and the weapon at hand—within the possible experience of almost every one of us. Here is an easy-going, life-enjoying human creature, grumbling at small things, because he has but them to

complain of (just such another as you or I, reader); who knows nothing of crime and criminals except what he reads in the newspapers. A moment of time elapses, and he becomes a man-slayer. A revolution has taken place in his circumstances more hideous by far to him than if half the universe (not *his* half, but the other) had been swallowed up in flame. Nay, he would welcome the immediate advent of the judgment-day, since God would understand the strength and instancy of the temptation, and perhaps forgive it; whereas man will make no such allowance. He is no longer man's fellow-creature; no longer free, but a Felon. The very crown of sorrow—"the remembrance of happier things," and the remembrance only—will be his for ever.

The gulf between innocence and guilt is not, however—except in this case—leaped over at a single bound. Our fall from honesty to downright crime is usually broken

by degrees—steppes of misdemeanour that shelve more and more steeply towards the abyss. The delinquent himself is comparatively unimpressed by the final catastrophe ; but to those about him, who have suspected nothing of his previous declensions — the wife, the children, who had imagined themselves to belong to an honest man—how terrible must be the shock !

We have hitherto known Kate Irby as a young lady of good condition and pleasant manners, suspected to have just so much will of her own as in the young and comely of her sex is engaging ; confessedly averse to poverty, yet bearing somewhat straightened means with cheerfulness and contentment ; nay, with something more, with gaiety ; for has not Maurice Glyn (fictionist) affirmed that but for this recent depression of her worldly position, he should never have ventured to propose himself for her husband, since fortune-hunting was a thing abhorrent

to him? and without Maurice (so it seemed to her), though she had possessed all other blessings, what was life?

There are scores and scores of such girls as Kate on English soil; fair maidens that will make good wives. I wonder if some sudden chance should strike them down (though without blame) to shame, whether they would bear themselves like her.

She is not sure, in the sense of its being proved, that what she now suspects is truth: she has at present only the written word of a scoundrel to vouch for it—sent to her by hand from the railway station; but she has no shadow of doubt that it is truth. No shadow!—alas, no gleam, rather, to cleave the darkness of her utter gloom; no ray of hope to reach her deep-sunk heart. She feels that the man who met her on the banks of Start was Robert Irby, and no other; that he whom she had once mourned as dead, she must now mourn with tenfold

bitterness as living. The great blank, stifling wall of conviction that surrounds her seems so solid, that, for herself, she would not strive to make a loophole; yet, for her mother's sake (she is thinking of her mother now, and scarcely at all of her lost lover), she must make assurance certain.

It is for this, and TO SEE HIM, that she rises a little after dawn, and lets herself out of the old house, that shall be no more her home, and takes the very road Sir Richard took not twelve hours before.

She has his letter folded in her bosom, like a coiled snake, and she takes it forth, and reads it for the twentieth time.

"Private" (so the heading runs), *"and to be burned as soon as read."*

"COUSIN KATE,

"Since we last met, something has happened which may yet alter your plans, although they seem so fixed. Your

father is not dead. I have seen and spoken with him ; and you will find him at Joseph Grange's cottage. You and your mother have been living (innocently, indeed, of course) on the proceeds of his fraud upon the insurance companies. His liberty—nay, his life, for he is sick, and a prison would kill him—is forfeit to the law. Shame and ruin overhang you. You have doubted that I really love you. Now is the time to test me. First convince yourself of the truth of what I write ; then trust to me to save your father from punishment, and your mother from the consequences (or even the knowledge—why not?) of his crime. At present, I feel convinced that you and I are the sole repositories of his secret. It rests with you whether we shall remain so. Become my wife, and good report will still be yours, besides wealth and station far beyond what you at present enjoy. Reject me—— But

why should I threaten? Why write one word of unkindness to her I love so well? Do not reject that love. I have subjoined my address in London, whither I go to-night. I shall expect to hear from you without fail by the post after next. If I do not hear—but I *shall* hear. I cannot think that you will transform so devoted a friend into your father's enemy.

“RICHARD ANSTEY.”

Perhaps to a stranger to the writer, the meaning of this letter might not have been altogether plain; but to Kate it was only too clear. She had well weighed every word of it, for time had not been wanting.

She had received her mother's consent to her marriage with Maurice Glyn, the previous evening. The young couple had come in to the drawing-room together, and Kate, taking his hand, had said: “This man is my choice, dear mother, and not Sir

Richard." And her mother, taken by surprise, and in face of such strong personal arguments, had not denied her her heart's desire. Kate had bidden her betrothed "Good-night," and retired to her own little room, and was on her knees thanking God for such great happiness, when her maid brought her Richard's letter, marked on the outside, "For Miss Kate's own hand."

At first the news had seemed too terrible to be believed ; then the revulsion from bliss to the extremity of unlooked-for woe had prostrated her altogether ; then reason slowly and painfully took the place of blank despair. She had had a whole sleepless night to brood over that letter, and during such a vigil thought is very busy. Her cousin's intentions were as clear to her as though they had been written thus : "Marry me, and all will be well ; reject my offer, and I will put the law upon the scent of its victim. I am in London for that very purpose."

She had observed to Maurice, when Sir Richard left them by the river, what an evil look he had cast behind him ; and Maurice had answered, in his cool professional way, "Many a man is a murderer at heart at least once in his life, and no doubt, my darling, he would kill us both if he could."

And now a revenge more terrible than that—more terrible than imagination could have conceived, was in her cousin's power.

Much as she had thought of the matter, the alternative which Sir Richard had suggested never presented itself to her even for a single instant as possible. And yet she had quite given up the man she loved ; she had plucked from her bosom all idea of wedding him, notwithstanding that her heart lay at its root. She, the daughter of a felon, and who had been living for years upon the proceeds of her father's crime, was no bride for Maurice Glyn : no shame of hers should

smirch the name which would one day be so famous. In her obscure and ignominious future, she would have one pleasure left—"the devotion to something afar from the sphere of her sorrow"—in watching his fortunes grow, his fame increase. But with that thought she had done with him. By a great effort she had, for the time at least, got rid of all mere selfish grief. For one thing, amid all her wretchedness, she felt truly thankful—that Sir Richard had written to herself, and not to her mother. If his menace had been held over *her*; if his alternative had been put before *her*, who, even as matters were last night, had very reluctantly given up the idea of his alliance; how eagerly would she now advocate his views, with arguments hard to combat, and loving tears still harder to withstand! If, indeed, she could have looked into her daughter's inmost heart, she would have seen the fruitlessness of such endeavours, the

“never, never” which keenest contempt had engraven there; but no mere words could have convinced her. Yes, Kate thanked Heaven that at all events *that* trial was spared her—that she had not an enemy (powerful, because so dear a friend) to combat in her own camp. With all her love for her mother—and it was great, and much intensified by the presence of this common misfortune—Kate was by no means blind to the weak points in her character. She knew that Madam’s devotion to her own was more powerful (as it is in most women) than her sense of public duty; she felt, if this news were true about which she was now hastening to certify herself, that Mrs. Irby would be very loth to do what right demanded; that she would never voluntarily consent to see her beloved daughter exposed to penury; that she would wait until the law stepped in and stripped them of all they had with the strong hand (as sooner or later

it was sure to do), and give it by no means help, but rather hindrance.

Now, this in Kate's eyes would be nothing less than to make themselves parties to a fraud of which at present they were wholly guiltless, and she was well resolved that it should not be. It was not, she knew, that her mother was an unjust woman ; she loved right not the less, but her child more ; but it was Kate's plan to save her from such misleading love. If by any means she could have spared her mother altogether from the knowledge of what had come to pass, Kate would have sacrificed anything, suffered anything, done anything—except marry Richard Anstey.

The person that now alone shared Kate's thoughts with her mother was her father. But how differently did she, perforce, regard him ! She had only a dim remembrance of what he had been, but that was not a pleasing one. He had filled the house with coarse and brawling men, whose presence there had



confined her mother and herself to a couple of rooms, and kept her from roaming about the garden: his gusts of passion, of which she had been occasionally a witness — although soon over, and never directed against wife or daughter—had filled her childish mind with awe of him. She had been his pet indeed; but that description of affection is not always reciprocal, or, at all events, the strength of the love on one side bears no sort of proportion to that on the other.

It is a bitter thought that the wilfulness of man often brings contempt anew upon his memory long after he has been buried in his grave. His widow and grown-up children remember what is pleasant about him, and pardon his weaknesses for the sake of it when he dies; but the little ones of his household, if he have such, do not come to the knowledge of the evil he has left behind him until long after they have forgotten what was good about him. They suffer the



wrong he has bequeathed, and there is nothing to mitigate their sense of it. Thus, of late years, Kate Irby has been accustomed to regard her father scarcely more as such than as the cause of her mother's embarrassments. She had a tenderness for his memory, but her natural intelligence had told her that, judged by any moral standard, neither as husband nor father was he to be esteemed.

She could not associate the reckless, spendthrift man with any notion of self-sacrifice. She did not credit the motives (though in part the same as those she attributed to her mother), the passionate love for his own, which had caused him to dare the penalties of the law, and to exile himself from all that he held dear; the wistful love that had brought him back, old and broken, to incur the present peril: she only knew for certain, that his existence was a crime, and his presence at Blondel, ruin.

And yet, though these bitter thoughts sprang up, perforce, amid the ruins of her shattered hopes, the remembrance of the weary, worn old man to whom she had given alms, and who had blessed her in return with eyes whose tender yearning had haunted her for hours after, touched her young heart with pity. Beggar, felon, or what not, he was her father still, and she had no thought of deserting or disowning him.

None of the now scanty inmates of the manor-house have risen, as she opens for herself the great hall-door, and lets the early sunshine in. It seems to mock her with its warmth, and light, and cheerfulness. Every so familiar thing now wears a novel look—the look that is begotten of coming change. As in a dead man's face, an expression never beheld while he was in health and strength will sometimes appear, so, when we are about to leave some loved spot for ever, its lineaments take a shape never before seen,

or, at all events, never observed. Each moss-grown stone that formed the entrance-steps demanded her attention as she descended them; no flower-bed, no tree escaped it, till, with one long look towards the old lime-tree avenue, once haunted by a baseless memory, now sacred to a love for ever lost, she hurried out of the iron gates and down the road. How cruel and unsympathising to human woe is the face of nature! The air was full of autumn odours; the breezes were playing about the tree-tops; the birds pouring forth their matin song. Every leaflet held its sparkling jewel; the gossamer twinkled in the sun; the sapphire sky gave promise of a rainless day.

But what was wet or fine, henceforth, to her, who was never more to speculate on such slight matters? Had a tempest swept the earth, it would have roared by Kate unheeded.

The thicket through which she hastened dropped diamonds and pearls on her unconscious head; the grass beneath her heedless feet was dank with dew. Only at the stile where her cousin had halted the night before, she paused one moment, and pressed her hand upon her beating heart. Her father was in yonder cottage: the dead—alive!

Although the air was alive with nature's waking sounds, and the rooks wheeled and clanged about the priory walls with aimless persistence, there came no stir of life from the village hidden by the eastern hill. Was it five o'clock? Yes; from the unseen church tower five was striking—the time for rested labour to resume its toil. Was there any human creature in that humble hamlet, so poor, so old, so sick, that with them she would not have changed places if she could? It was but a few weeks ago that she had expressed her pity for the lot of Mary Grange; yet now, how blessed it seemed!

As the reflection crossed her mind, Mary herself appeared in the cottage garden; unbonneted, she stood at the little wicket, shading her eyes with her hand, and doubtless garnering all the beauty and freshness of the scene in her heart, a future store of joy and thankfulness. To Kate it seemed that neither earth nor sky could any more have power to make *her* glad or sorry. Presently Mary turned, and gazing round, as one with leisure gazes before he goes within doors, fixed her eyes on Kate. Kate, distant as she was, beheld her start and lay her hand upon the wicket, then slowly move towards the stile.

CHAPTER II.

KATE AND MARY.

“You are early this morning, Miss Kate,” said Mary, as she took the hand the former held out to her, as was her custom; for the two girls had been playmates in their youth, and even now their intercourse, notwithstanding the difference of their positions, was almost that of equals.

“Yes, Mary.”

“It is a morning to bring anybody out; and what a glorious day it promises to be. I hope Madam is well—but there, you can scarcely have seen her as yet, although she too is no sluggard.”

“No; I have not seen her.”

Kate spoke like an automaton; colourless,

smileless—expressionless, except for a certain anguish in her haggard eyes.

“You are surely not well, Miss Kate,” said Mary, anxiously. “This rising with the sun is very trying to those who are not used to it; and coming all that way, and through the wet wood, too.”

“I do feel a little faint, Mary—just a little. I will come with you to the cottage, and you shall give me a glass of water.”

“Do, Miss Kate, do; and sit down and wait awhile. Please to take my arm.”

Kate had expected the girl to make some excuse; to offer to bring the refreshment out to her, at the stile; and this readiness to receive her lit a solitary spark of hope. If Richard's words were true, and the man he spoke of was really under yonder roof, Mary would surely not have invited her beneath it. But the next moment, she called to mind another sentence in her

cousin's letter: "At present, I feel convinced that you and I are the sole repositories of this secret;" and her heart grew numb and cold again as before. Mary, and doubtless her blind father likewise, were ignorant of the identity of their guest. A few steps more, and perhaps, through the open door, she would see him sitting in the cottage-parlour.

"Why, dear Miss Kate, you are all of a tremble! I do hope you will not do such an imprudent thing again as take so long a walk hours before your breakfast-time. However, you shall breakfast with me. Fortunately, I have got the fire alight, and you shall have a cup of tea and a bit of toast in less than no time."

The little hearth was indeed already glowing cheerfully, as Kate sat shivering down beside it, after casting one hurried glance about the room, tenantless except for their two selves. Her ears were stretched to

listen if any one was in the inner rooms, hidden by the closed doors.

"Will you have a bit of fried bacon, miss? I have nothing but that, I am afraid, and this morsel of honeycomb."

"Thank you. I am not at all hungry, Mary; anything will do," answered Kate, half-choked with her own words; then adding as carelessly as she could: "I suppose your father does not breakfast so early as this?"

"No, Miss Kate. He is not like other old folks, who are fond of early rising; for, alas! there is no beauty of earth to gladden him—no dewy fields, no shining trees. The sun itself is no better to him, dear heart! than yonder fire."

"Yes; it is very sad indeed. But he does not know what he misses, Mary. It is the man who has had the power of vision, and has lost it, whose lot is the most pitiable of all. It is only he who has



been happy who can sound the depths of unhappiness."

"God gives us strength, Miss Kate, so that, at last, whatever our burden—unless it be that of unrepented guilt—it becomes endurable."

"Ay, guilt and shame, Mary: those are the two things that wither up the heart."

"Nay, Miss Kate. There is but one thing, guilt: for without guilt, there is no need of shame."

"Not for one's-self, Mary; perhaps so; but oftentimes for others."

Mary did not answer. She had grown very pale.

"Here is the tea, Miss Kate. Take a sup of it; it will do you good."

Kate put her lips to the cup, and that was all. Her throat was parched, but she felt she could not swallow. What mortal man or woman is so blessed as never to have experienced the like?

“It is a long time since I have been in your cottage, Mary; that is, except in this parlour. It has two other rooms, has it not?”

“Yes, Miss Kate. My father’s and my own little room. Would you like to see it? If you still feel faint, you might dip your face in water, or lie down for an hour on my bed.”

“I should like to see it.”

“By all means, Miss Kate.”

There it was; the tiniest little chamber imaginable, but exquisitely neat and clean. We have looked into it, through the open lattice, already.

“And your father’s room is still smaller?”

“Yes, indeed. In warm weather I have sometimes put his bed into the parlour. He feels the heat very much.”

“And there is no other room in the house?”

"None, Miss Kate. But the parlour is large, and we have plenty of cupboards in which to keep things; here, you see, and here again."

They were back again in the parlour, now. Kate sat in the old arm-chair, with her face resting on her hand, thinking. The letter she carried in her bosom had lost half its weight; her breath began to come and go quite freely. Her cousin, half mad with rage and disappointment, had invented the whole story, just to give her a night's wretchedness. It was a devil's trick—nothing less—and scarcely could she credit such wicked malice; but, doubtless, so it was.

A sudden thought once more stopped all her pulses. "Mary," said she, "I wish to see your father."

"My father, Miss Kate? He is not—— I mean, it is so early. He does not rise so soon. He likes to sleep all he can. While

he sleeps he enjoys the same pleasure as those who can see ; you understand."

"There is no hurry, Mary ; I will wait till he gets up."

"But, dear Miss Kate, that will be hours hence. He would be distressed—I am sure he will—to know you waited for him. He shall come up to the manor to-night, or at latest to-morrow."

The door was still open through which they had just passed, and beyond it lay that of the gate-keeper's room, visible from where Kate sat. She pointed to it with her finger, and fixing her earnest eyes on Mary, demanded : "Is he really there?"

Mary clutched the mantelpiece—just as she had grasped the garden-gate when she first caught sight of her visitor, and answered : "No ; he is not there." It was a curious idiosyncrasy of Mary's that she could not tell a downright lie. "He has gone out."

"So early?" answered Kate, in hollow tones; "and alone?"

"Not alone."

"Who was with him, Mary?"

"An old man; a—beggar-man; a—sort of tramp, to whom my father has shown some kindness. We have taken him in for a night or two, for he was very ill—he slept in father's room, and father here."

"Do you know who that beggar-man was, Mary?"

"No, I do not, Miss Kate."

"But you guess? You have a suspicion? I read it in your eyes."

"O Miss Kate, Miss Kate!"

"Yes, you know all, I see. Leave off wringing your hands, girl. And don't call me 'Miss;' call me Kate—if you are not ashamed to speak to me at all. And come here and kiss your old playmate, Mary."

The two girls were sobbing in one an-

other's arms, as though their hearts would break.

"God help me !"

"He will, He will, dearest Kate. Hush, hush ! People will be passing to their work, and must not hear us. We must be secret above all things. I have been told nothing, but I am sure of that."

"Alas, Mary, dear, since you talk so you know nothing—at least of what must come of it. Sit down in the chair here, and I upon the stool at your feet, Mary, where you cannot see my face. I will hide it in your lap, as I used to hide it in my mother's at my prayers. Now, tell me all. I can bear it so ; and I must bear it. When did he come, and how ? When did you first see him ?"

"Three weeks ago, Miss Kate, or may be more. One night, when we were going to bed, he called ; he was in rags, and very ill and pinched to look at." The fair head that nestled beside her shook from side to side,

and a shudder passed through the kneeling frame. "Still, there was something in his face—if he had been young and strong, I might have called it sauciness; at all events, it was not the air of one who has stood, cap in hand, for years, to ask for charity; but he spoke in the whining tone that beggars use."

"What did he talk of, Mary?"

"Partly of his own wanderings, telling us how he had roamed in foreign parts, as well as in England, but chiefly he asked questions. Who was 'Madam' of whom we spoke, and had she children? At last he got to ask about yourself, Miss Kate—then his voice changed. I saw that he had been speaking in feigned tones, although he returned to them at once. I suspected nothing, of course, beyond that. But my father was greatly moved. It is by the voice you know that a blind man recognises his fellow-creatures. Presently, our visitor asked for

accommodation for the night. We had (as you have seen) none to give him, there being only my father's room and mine. Then he asked to sleep at the priory. I felt confident that my father would not grant this request; but he did so at once. He even accompanied the stranger to the ruins, and lit a fire in the gate-room where he was to sleep. I knew then for certain that our visitor was something else, and more than he assumed to be, and that my father knew him. Some breakfast was taken to him the next morning before I was up; and when we went down, as usual, to the ruins, he was gone."

"For how long did he go, Mary? When did you see him next?"

"He came back ten days ago, much altered in appearance for the worse. Indeed, he said he had been dreadfully ill; unable to move from some little alehouse, where he had put up for the night. I don't know where he had been; but it was, I fancy, on

some errand of importance, the issue of which had been successful beyond his hopes. I gathered that from his manner—which was gay and triumphant, notwithstanding his physical ailments—and from snatches of talk overheard on the evening of his return between himself and my father. They used to converse together in this room, where a bed had been made up for father (his own chamber being given up to the sick man), and the wall is so thin that I could not help overhearing them. That first night I heard these words, Miss Kate: ‘It is very rash and very dangerous,’ remonstrated my father, ‘especially if he has really recognised you.’

“‘No, no; he did not,’ returned the other. ‘I have come a thousand miles to look upon my darling’s face, and I must see it once before I die.’

“Of course I did not know what this meant; but I knew that there was some secret of importance, for my father enjoined

me to tell no one that we had a lodger at the cottage. The next day and the next, and for many days, our guest was far too ill to move; but one morning, feeling a little stronger, he said he should pay a visit to the manor-house. 'You had better not,' said my father, gravely.

"'I must, I must!' answered he; and then I knew, by the passionate pleading of his tone, that it was at the manor-house his darling lived whose face he had come half across the world to see."

"Poor man, poor man!" sobbed Kate.
"I saw him, Mary—I saw him."

"Yes, dear, you did. He went up to his own house like a thief in the night; the dog flew at him and tore him. Think of that, Miss Kate! Whatever he has done—for I fear that it is something amiss—oh, think of what he has suffered!"

"I do, I do.—Go on, Mary."

"Well, he came back to us that evening,

like another man; not better—indeed, far worse, through the exertion and excitement—but in better heart. ‘I have seen your young lady,’ said he to me: ‘she is all you said of her. God bless her!’ I think he would have gone away that very day, satisfied to have seen your face, but that he was too bad to stir. He lay here, in great pain and very ill, I fear, for days. Father and I left him yesterday in bed, as usual, and went down to the ruins. When we came back he was up and dressed, and in a state of the greatest anxiety. They two had a long talk, while I was sent into the garden; I know not what about, but the upshot was they went away together, by the earliest train this morning to London. I fancy something had occurred to frighten the invalid—some hazard of discovery.”

“He *was* discovered, Mary. He was seen and recognised by Richard.”

“By your cousin, Miss Kate? Was *he*

here?" Mary turned pale, and trembled; but dismissing her own trouble, she continued: "That is surely good, so far. I do not understand the danger; but the secret will be safe in your cousin's hands."

"Less safe in his hands than any man's, Mary. Read this."

She took Sir Richard's letter from her bosom, and handed it to her companion.

"Then you are not going to marry him?" was Mary's first exclamation when she had read it.

"Marry *him*? Never!"

"Thank God for that, Miss Kate! Sir Richard is a bad man."

"But the letter? Do you understand what it means, what it menaces? You have guessed who that unhappy man is whose ruin is here sought, but do you see what he has done?"

"Alas, I do. He is much, very much to blame."

"Blame!" Kate clutched her by the wrist, and whispered hoarsely: "It is no fault, girl—it is a crime. He has committed felony."

"Yes, poor man; and has suffered for it years of exile: forlorn, unfriended, beggared: and all for your mother's sake and yours, Miss Kate."

"Yes. And he has now come back to break my mother's heart (for it *will* break when she comes to know this); and as for me, I wish I could die this minute. Ah, Mary, you do not know—how should you?—what it is to be beloved, and yet, for your dear one's sake, to put his love aside!"

Kate, hiding her passionate sobs in her companion's lap, did not mark the sudden anguish of Mary's eyes; the haggard smile that lit up for an instant her pallid face, just as lightning turns some fair scene to livid white.

"Yet I pity you, Miss Kate, God knows. My heart bleeds for you and for Madam: but then your course is easy; and I am right sure you have determined on it: is it not so?"

"To make restitution so far as we are able? Yes."

"Brave heart! It is your father, then — your own father, my darling — about whose sad plight we have chiefly to consider."

"And what is to be done, Mary? Give me counsel, for I need it. I have no friend in the world of whom to ask it but yourself. Think, think!"

There was silence for a little, and then Mary spoke.

"I believe there is no immediate danger, dear Miss Kate. Your father is in safe hiding for the present, and forewarned is forearmed. We must strive to keep Sir Richard off the scent."

“Ay, the bloodhound!”

“In the meantime, by offering to give up to the insurance company whatever proportion of your property they may demand——”

“All, all, Mary. I would rather work my fingers to the bone than keep one sixpence. Twice what we have would not repay them.”

“Just so. They merely want their money, however—as much as they can get, that is—and not vengeance. It is only Sir Richard who thirsts for that.”

“Has my poor father any money?” asked Kate, suddenly.

“Yes, he has. I know he had three pounds of his own when he went away; and my father”—Mary blushed, for the blind man, always fearing penury, was very saving, and indeed his enemies called him “Miser Grange”—“has a little store.—**N**ay, Miss Kate, there is no need of thanks, **f**or everything we have is his, since it came

to us from your family. I was about to say, that since the insurance company is to be treated with, you cannot go to them—to their secretary, for instance—at once in person, and tell him all. It would be his duty, and he would have no choice but to punish.”

Kate shuddered. “What, then, do you advise?”

“Have you no friend who could be trusted?”

“Yes.” Kate smiled for the first time that morning.

“A man of business,” continued Mary, “who would know how to conduct the affair, such as Madam’s lawyer, Mr Crozley. What do you think of consulting him?”

“Suppose, being a lawyer, he should think it his duty, as you say the secretary would do, to ——”

Kate did not finish the sentence, but her

face, raised to Mary's with a look of unutterable terror, did service for her tongue.

"We must risk something, dear Miss Kate, and that seems to me the least risk."

And so, although the talk between the girls continued for some time, it was finally agreed between them that the best thing to be done, and without informing Mrs. Irby of what had happened, was to lay the matter before Mr. Crozley.

CHAPTER III.

A KNIGHT-ERRANT.

FRESH and bright was still the autumn morning, when Maurice Glyn appeared at the vicarage breakfast-table, although it was hours after the events recorded in our last chapter. His face was flushed with happiness, and it was with effort that he repressed his exuberant spirits, lest they should jar upon the melancholy of his host. He had told him over-night of his engagement to Kate, and the poor curate could not help contrasting with that fortunate result the bitter end of his own recent love-making. But he had congratulated Maurice with all his heart, and was genuinely glad, not only that his guest had secured so charming a bride for himself, but that he had put Sir

Richard out of court. Moreover, it was pleasant to think that he should now have his friend permanently near him, if at least healing Time should permit his own continuance at Blondel; for at present it was a hard trial to him to be so near, and yet so far, from her he loved; to meet her in his daily walks, and yet not touch her hand; to pass by the cottage where he had once been so welcome a visitor. At church, too, as he scanned his flock from the pulpit, the temptation was irresistible to glance towards the spot where Mary sat beside her sightless father, with eyes downdrooped so low that she scarce saw more than he. Notwithstanding all his efforts, the thoughts of her would mingle with the curate's prayers.

What hopes and happiness, what disappointments and despairs, grow up together in every human crop, no matter how limited its extent, as here in Little Blondel! And what sudden reverses too! Revolutions



wherein, "*hey presto*, foul is fair, and fair is foul," the wretched are raised to bliss, the blissful suddenly sink into unutterable woe ; where even the compassionate, alas, are themselves often found to stand in sore need of pity !

The curate started on his plodding round ; and Maurice Glyn, swinging his stick and whistling cheerily, walked briskly off towards the manor-house. Did ever the birds sing so sweetly, was ever the blue air so pure, as seemed to him that morning ? And yet, if the evil demons, whose habitation holy men have written is in the air itself, have knowledge of human affairs, and are at any time permitted enjoyment of them—to take malicious pleasure in the woes of man—they must have exulted over Maurice Glyn, and whirled the first doomed leaves about his head with devilish glee. Mrs. Irby and her daughter—the latter very pale, and pleading headache as an excuse for want of appetite—



beheld him from the breakfast-room window coming up the carriage-sweep ; and Madam, with a loving nod at Kate, and " I daresay you can excuse my presence, dear," discreetly left the room before the visitor entered it.

" My own sweet Kate ! " cried he, all radiant, as the door closed behind him : then the arms that he had held out to greet her fell down beside him, and he stood transfixed.

" Good God ! what is the matter, darling ? "

His love-sharpened eyes pierced deeper even than a mother's ; he saw that Kate was deadly ill, and from the outstretched hand forbidding his approach, and from the despairing eye, drew direst news.

" All is over, Maurice. You must not kiss me ; I can never be your wife ! "

If the earth had gaped, and suddenly

taken the articles of furniture between himself and Kate at its own valuation, Maurice Glyn could not have been more astonished. His brain reeled, his limbs failed him; he sank down in the nearest chair, and put his hand to his forehead. Had he heard aright, or was he seized with vertigo—nay, stark madness? Or was it Kate that was mad? She did not look unlike it. Her eyes were staring out of her white face with shocking intensity; her form, with that prohibiting right hand still stretched, with the palm outward, was rigid as a statue.

“I am not mad,” she said, “although it is a wonder that I keep my senses. Something has happened, Mr. Glyn, since I last saw you—yes, since last night—which renders our union utterly impossible.”

“Impossible?” echoed Maurice, like one in a dream.

“Quite hopeless, Maurice. Dismiss from your mind all idea of being my husband;

and may Heaven send you a wife more worthy of you."

"Kate, my own dear Kate, what does this mean?"

"Do not ask me, Mr. Glyn; I cannot answer you. It must suffice to say that we can be nothing to one another—that is, only friends. Arguments are useless; do not use them. There is a bar to our union which is insurmountable, although twelve hours ago I did not know of its existence."

"What bar?"

"The bar of shame: I should disgrace the man who took me for his wife."

"I will never believe it," cried Maurice, starting to his feet as though another had put some insult on her.

"That is," continued she hastily, turning for an instant crimson, "it is no sin of mine, Maurice, but of one belonging to me—my parent. What am I saying? You are cruel to thus press me. I will answer

nothing to your questions, unless you torture me with asking for my hand, and then my reply is: 'Never.'"

"Is it possible," said Maurice, huskily, "that, urged by your mother's entreaties, you have consented——"

"Yes, perhaps that is it," cried Kate; "it may be, or it may not. You have no right to ask, when I have declined your suit; it is not behaving like a gentleman; it is—it is not kind, Maurice Glyn."

Here voice and limbs alike failed her; she sat down and burst into tears. He drew his chair close to hers; but she crossed her hands upon her bosom, and so vehemently shook her head, that the light brown hair escaped from its slender bands, and covered her weeping face.

"She shrinks and shudders from my touch with loathing!" cried Maurice in an agony. "Great Heaven, what have I done to deserve this?"

“Nothing, sir—nothing, Mr. Glyn. You have been always—— Oh, spare me, sir; leave me.”

“Why?” asked Maurice, this time with sharp severity; his pride was touched.

“Because I am a beggar. Yes, it is so, though I cannot tell you how it is: that to begin with, Mr. Glyn. We have not one single sixpence—my mother and I—which we can call our own.”

“I shall have to work the harder, Kate, that is all.”

“No, it is not all; there is the shame; how can you force me again to speak of it? How can you have the heart? There is the shame which forbids me to disgrace you—such a shame as you can never imagine. That is enough; my lips are locked; I will say nothing more. For Heaven’s sake, leave me.”

“What shame, Kate?”

"The shadow cast by crime : you hear me—*crime*."

"And committed by *you*, Kate ? No, no."

"Never mind by whom committed, sir ; the shame is mine."

"Not in my eyes, Kate, let the world say what it will. You hinted at your parent ; that seems to me almost as incredible. I am sure there is some terrible mistake. Your mother shall explain, since you will not."

"My mother !" shrieked the girl ; "O no, sir. If you have any pity in your soul, do not speak of this to her ; it will kill her. For the time at least—a few days more or less—let us seem before her to be—as we were yesterday—betrothed. I beg this of you upon my bended knees." And she suddenly threw herself at his feet.

"Rise, Miss Irby, rise," returned he, coldly ; and although he lifted her with

tenderness, his tight-clenched lips and straight-set eyes gave token to those who knew laughing Maurice Glyn that the limit of his forbearance was reached. "I resign your hand since you thus fling it from you, though you accepted it only yesterday. I will no longer pain you by persistence in a rejected suit. But I have my own good name to look to. Like you, Kate, I fear shame—the only shame that demands fear, however, that born of one's own ill-doing—and it shall never be said that I played the hypocrite to one who has received me as her guest; to one who has accepted me as her son. I go; but, as sure as I have breath, it is straight to your mother, to ask her what all this means—unless you choose to tell me the whole truth yourself."

She looked up in his face with passionate appeal; but it was implacable.

"I am quite resolved, Kate; you may be sure of that."

"It is a shameful secret which I have to tell, sir; and ruin as well as shame will befall this roof if it is disclosed."

"I would let out my life-blood sooner than whisper it, Kate."

"Then *I* must tell it you—since you will have it so, Mr. Glyn."

Side by side they sat; but with every word, as the story of her father's fraud fell from her lips, she seemed to be withdrawing further and further from him. Maurice did not interpose one single word; and when she finished with: "You now see plainly, sir, that I could never taint your name by sharing it," he answered: "Yes, I see; that is quite out of the question:" then added, in cold thoughtful tones: "But we can be friends, Kate, still. It is most fortunate that you did not go to Mr. Crozley. Now, I happen to know the secretary of one of these very insurance societies, and perhaps can do something."

"Oh, Mr. Glyn, you do not shrink from us, then?"

"Certainly not, Miss Irby."

"And you will even help me where I so much need help, and you will forgive me the cruel wrong which I have unconsciously done you? God send you some day"—she lifted his hand with her cold fingers to her lips—"a wife who will repay you——"

"Nay, nay," interrupted Maurice, hastily; "we must not talk of that now. And don't be grateful, my good young lady, till the benefit has been conferred. You see this matter lies in my line, since I am a barrister; and I am just your friend and legal adviser, that is all."

"That is all," replied Kate, in a hollow voice. "How noble it is of you thus to return good for evil!"

"Yes; and especially to work for nothing; a lawyer to give advice without fees," observed Maurice. "Why don't you say *that*,

Miss Irby? Really one would imagine that you had, entertained apprehensions that I should have acted like your charming cousin, and given information to the police."

Kate shuddered.

"Forgive me, Miss Irby. This is indeed a most smileless matter, and needs all our wits. Before I embark upon it, I have only one word to say. While fully understanding that our mutual relation is, for the reasons you have supplied, entirely changed—that henceforth, except when in the presence of others, we are only friends, though sincere ones—still, I wish to say, that so far as yourself and your mother are concerned, my esteem and respect remain unaltered, wholly untouched by the shadow which unhappily has fallen on your name. I make myself understood, I hope, without offence?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Glyn; and from the bottom of my heart, I thank you."



"Very good : but I think you had better call me Maurice, as you will have to do so when we are not alone : just for uniformity's sake, you know, *Maurice*, don't you see ?"

"As you like, Mr. Glyn—well, Maurice."

"Just so ; and now to business. How much is owing to these insurance companies ?"

"We received fifteen thousand pounds at my father's—— I mean that was the amount of his policy."

"Fifteen thousand pounds, and the compound interest of it for ten years—that is what is morally owing to these people."

"Heaven help us, Mr. Glyn ! If everything were sold to-morrow, I don't think we are worth five thousand pounds."

"Very likely, Miss Irby ; but when folks don't expect to get a penny—when they have written it all off as a bad debt—five thousand pounds, or even less, is very welcome to them."

"You think, then, that they would not be revengeful, not cruel——"

"It would be their bounden duty to prosecute, I am afraid," reflected Maurice, "unless it could be shown that such a course would be—ahem—diametrically opposed to their interest."

"We must take no advantage of them, Mr. Glyn: we must unconditionally give up everything."

"Everything but the person who is in fault, Miss Irby. He has been punished enough already, surely. Be assured, I will consult your honour as if it were my own; but you have placed the case in my hands, and must suffer me to deal with it in my own way."

"Thankfully, most thankfully, Mr. Glyn."

"I do not think that, as regards the insurance offices, some sort of compromise is impossible," pursued Maurice, thoughtfully: "not that we are in a position to make



terms, of course, but they may be unwilling to bear hard upon us."

"They have been shamefully ill-treated, Mr. Glyn," sighed Kate. "I should never feel easy for the future, if all was not paid that we had to give."

"Just so: very right, Kate. But it is not the company I fear just now, so much as the rascal who wrote that letter. What we have first to look to, is to get your father safely out of his reach."

"He is ill, Maurice; sick to death, I fear, from what Mary told me. My place—if I could only account for my absence to my mother—should be at his bedside."

"You can never account for it, Kate," returned the other, decisively: "and, besides, are not a blind man and a sick man, who travel together, mark enough for those whom your cousin will send after them, without your following to make their trail more certain? No; you must stop at



home. This villain must be balked at all costs."

"That will need money, will it not?" said she, timidly. "I think I could get a little, Mr. Glyn. My mother would give me anything I asked, that is within her power, almost without question."

"There is no need of that at present, Kate," rejoined Maurice, thoughtfully. "The gate-keeper returns to-night. I must see him at once, and Mary too. They are both to be depended on implicitly, of course?"

"I would answer with my life for Mary; but I believe them both to be as true as steel."

"Good. We are safe from bribery then."

"Bribery?"

"Certainly. This Richard Anstey will not leave a stone unturned; he who wants revenge sticks at nothing. 'The post after next,' the scoundrel says: that gives us twenty-four hours' start. If your father



were not ill, escape would be comparatively easy ; but—is he too weak to walk ? ”

“ I fear so ; at least he cannot move without assistance.”

“ Well, Kate, there is hard work before us, but we must do our best. As soon as I have learned your father’s address from the gate-keeper, I start for town at once. I shall tell your mother, what is true enough, that important business calls me away : fortunately, Milton expects that I shall leave him for a day or two, to arrange certain matters, which need no arrangement now ; whatever you have to write to me, send to this address—no, not under cover of it—it is I who am Mr. John Robinson, at your service ; and you may let your servant direct the envelopes : and stay ; post your letters at Blondel Regis. It is just possible that the man at the office here may be tampered with ; and he does not impress me as being above all pecuniary temptation.”

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"Hush! That is wasting time, Kate. Consider me simply as the advocate engaged in your defence, although, indeed, I shall have to do a thing or two which pedantic persons learned in the law might consider slightly unprofessional."

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"My honour will take care of itself," replied Maurice, gaily: "to this cause I dedicate myself. By your kind permission, I seize this glove—yes, you must let me have it—to stick in my helmet for a token; and I go to lay lance in rest against the most recreant knight and perjured traitor that ever plotted against damsel fair."

"Mr. Glyn," cried Kate, with a sudden flush of colour, "you will not forget the—the agreement between us: never seek to cancel it; not for a moment disinter, to the misery of us both, what is dead and buried, and can never again exist."

"Surely not, Miss Irby. We have settled that, I thought. But, ere I go, you will not grudge me your hand."

"Good-bye, Mr.—Maurice. God bless and prosper you."

"And God bless *you*, Kate."

He was gone: he had touched her forehead with his lips, just to seal their new bond of friendship; but as a lover she had lost him for ever, just as she had begun to learn his worth. He had sought her mother to take his leave. She listened, and presently were heard his hurrying footsteps in the hall; then the great front-door clanged. From behind the blind, she watched his swift-retreating form. He did not look back



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CHAPTER IV.

THE PLANS AND MEDITATIONS OF MR. MAURICE GLYN.

“THAT this should have happened to *me*!” muttered Maurice Glyn, as he found himself once more upon the road which he had lately trodden with steps so buoyant with happiness, and was now about to re-traverse under such altered circumstances—“to *me*, of all men—a novelist by trade, and yet not to be able to write a word about it! What materials are here wasted, for I suppose” (reflectively) “it is quite impossible for me to use them? Yes, the fate of Tantalus was a mere nothing to mine. Yet how admirably I could have worked it up! Ah, Miss Kate, what an immortality *you* have missed! What a fine character I should



have been myself!—that is, in my own hands! And what a magnificent scoundrel Sir Richard would have turned out! But now there is nothing for it but to waste one's energies in action."

Self-mockery was the mask which Maurice Glyn wore, even when alone, to hide his disappointment, wounded pride, or any other uncomfortable feeling; but he did not feel the less upon that account either for himself or others. "Poor dear girl," he went on, in tender tones; "how she does take it to heart! As if one was morally answerable for all the misdoings of one's progenitors. I pity the progeny that shall become responsible for mine. There is no real sense of injustice among women; they have no healthy recognition, as a man has, of what we call an 'infernal shame,' else she wouldn't take on so about a peccadillo—'penal servitude for life' is the view which the law takes of it, by the by—committed by somebody else;

though that somebody is unfortunately her father. But it is not only women who are such fools. When a man, by some piece of political rascality, or the complaisance of a pretty wife, or the mere force of ill-got wealth, becomes a lord, how readily the son takes all the disgrace upon himself, as if 'the Honourable' Mr. Smith had ever done anything to earn the title beyond the giving himself airs. And I will say for Kate, notwithstanding the sentimental notions which she entertains to her own detriment, she is fair as respects others. Women are always generous in pecuniary matters (except when they are detestably mean), but they are not often fair. 'We must take no advantage of them,' said she; 'we must unconditionally give up everything.' That was very pretty of her, and right and proper. I think, at one time—before I went to Lincoln's Inn—that I could almost, if similarly situated, have said the same. But there is nothing

like education—and especially a legal one—for preventing a man from doing right all in a hurry. But for all that I tell you *what*,” said Maurice, stopping short, and addressing a most respectable rook sitting on an elm-branch by the way-side, “I’m deuced glad it’s a *Company*, and not an individual that has been defrauded. It would not be nice (even by proxy) to have caused ‘widows’ groans and orphans’ moans’—I should not like it myself if *my* father had done it; whereas a Company or a Board, my friend, why, it almost invites fraud—defies it, at all events—keeps a lawyer expressly to detect it. But to deceive *three* insurances!”

The rook flew away.

“Just so,” said Maurice; “one *can’t* stand that—can one? It would be grand if it was not so shabby. It is absolutely Napoleonic. If I do meet with this wonderful man, how shall I ever keep my hands off him? What a temptation! What a cha-

racter! A man with a policy in these times is rare enough; but a man with *three* policies, and all of them realised! What an opportunity is here offered, of which I can never take advantage! What do I not miss! What strokes of humour, nay, what touches of pathos—for I do believe that Kate has represented the man's motives in their true light. Having reduced his family to beggary by his wild ways, he reimburses them by this grand *coup*, at the sacrifice of all that makes life dear. If the *coup* were not a crime, nothing could be finer——”

Mr. Glyn's reflections were here interrupted: he had reached the place where the road which led to the railway station met the main road, and up the former was coming a stranger with a carpet-bag in his hand, who called out to him: “If you please, sir, is the village to the left or right?”

“It lies on the way which I am going;



you can't miss it," returned Maurice, scanning the stranger carelessly; he had the faculty of observation in perfection, and "spotted" * ordinary folks at the first glance. A stout, perspiring person, in rusty black, looking like an "uncovenanted" clergyman, and with the unmistakable accent of Cockaigne, was not a desirable companion; and, besides, Mr. Glyn had his own thoughts to attend to, so he walked on at an increased rate of speed.

However, "jog, jog—thump, thump," like an elephant at the double, he heard the other coming up behind him.

"Beg pardon, sir; I am a stranger in these parts. Can you tell me which is the best inn in Blondel Parva?"

"There is only one, so you can make no mistake—*the Bell*."

* Admirable word, although probably borrowed from the jargon of the billiard-room; to spot—to know the spot ball from the plain (not always easy) at a single glance.

were not ill, escape would be comparatively easy ; but—is he too weak to walk ? ”

“ I fear so ; at least he cannot move without assistance.”

“ Well, Kate, there is hard work before us, but we must do our best. As soon as I have learned your father’s address from the gate-keeper, I start for town at once. I shall tell your mother, what is true enough, that important business calls me away : fortunately, Milton expects that I shall leave him for a day or two, to arrange certain matters, which need no arrangement now ; whatever you have to write to me, send to this address—no, not under cover of it—it is I who am Mr. John Robinson, at your service ; and you may let your servant direct the envelopes : and stay ; post your letters at Blondel Regis. It is just possible that the man at the office here may be tampered with ; and he does not impress me as being above all pecuniary temptation.”

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"Oh, I see. Yes; the gate-keeper's name is Joseph Grange."

"Thank you, sir. And would you kindly tell me where I shall find his cottage?"

"He is always on duty at the priory, and therefore you are sure to find him *there*," said Maurice. "This is the house where I am staying; so good-day, my friend."

"Good-day, sir, and thank you."

On trudged the collector of brasses, without once looking back, and Maurice Glyn stared long and hard at him over the vicarage gate; then, with that expression which is always written "humph!" (as though puzzled persons became thereby paviers,) he walked slowly up the lawn towards the house.

His portmanteau packed, and a note written for the curate, in case of not seeing him on his return before starting by the

once—yes, once; as he reached the iron gates he turned and put his hand up to his hat in farewell—in farewell, but more; he held her glove within his fingers, as though he would have said: “I wear your token in my helm, you see. I am your true knight.”

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He was gone: he had touched her forehead with his lips, just to seal their new bond of friendship; but as a lover she had lost him for ever, just as she had begun to learn his worth. He had sought her mother to take his leave. She listened, and presently were heard his hurrying footsteps in the hall; then the great front-door clanged. From behind the blind, she watched his swift-retreating form. He did not look back

once—yes, once; as he reached the iron gates he turned and put his hand up to his hat in farewell—in farewell, but more; he held her glove within his fingers, as though he would have said: “I wear your token in my helm, you see. I am your true knight.”

piece of good news, in this respect, was, that Sir Richard Anstey had not as yet communicated with the companies, but was endeavouring to run down his game alone. Maurice had not the two-fold enemy to guard against. He always wound up with an entreaty that Kate should keep up her spirits, and the assurance that he was her very sincere friend and well-wisher. His letters were in tone precisely those of a paid agent, who also takes a friendly interest in the affairs of his employer.

In reply, Kate wrote to "Mr. Robinson," with grateful and even affectionate fervour, but in a strain infinitely removed from that of love. She could never show herself sufficiently sensible of his efforts to serve her and hers ; of his noble forgetfulness of the wrong she had unconsciously done him. He would always have her prayers. She assured him how, thanks to his good offices, he felt more hopeful—or, at all events, less



despairing, than she had thought possible. Her greatest trial was the deception she was obliged to practise towards her mother.

“She speaks of matters which, although they are dead and have no resurrection, yet have life enough in their mere memory to wring my heart. She prides herself (dear heart!) on our improved finances; for we are really living within our income, and I rejoice at it, although the savings are not for us. ‘You will be quite an heiress, Kate, my darling, after all,’ said my poor mother yesterday. But pardon me, Maurice” [the name was here almost entirely erased, and “Mr. Glyn” written over it]; “I must not thus make your heart ache.”

Of matters at Blondel she had little to tell; but since he had bidden her to write him fullest details, she mentioned that a stranger was staying at *the Bell*—his mission, it seemed, to secure impressions of brasses from the tombs in the priory—a

vulgar, prying sort of person, who had introduced himself a day or two ago, on some pretence, into the manor-house, and had been repeatedly seen loitering about the gate-keeper's cottage. Mary did not seem impressed with the notion that he had any object—but to herself everything seemed pregnant with danger—and would it not be better for Mr. Glyn to drop a line of warning? In conclusion, she always sent her love—and in one instance (since Maurice said the sick man had asked for it) her full forgiveness—to her father.

Much of Kate's time was now passed at the cottage, or at the priory, in the companionship of Mary and the gate-keeper; the only ones with whom she could converse upon the matter next her heart. The old man spoke to her readily enough of what she already knew—that is, concerning his recognition of his late master (for he always called him "Master")—but with respect to



the state of mind and body of her unfortunate father, he was very reticent. "As for being sorry for all that had come and gone, if *that* was what Miss Kate meant, Master was grievously burdened with the thought of the ruin impending over wife and daughter; he bitterly reproached himself for having ventured to Blondel, and thereby revealed his identity to Sir Richard; but he was not sorry—that was the truth—that he had come home, even though it were but to die." [And here the blind man would chuckle to himself in an inexplicable, and, indeed, a rather horrible way.] "Master was very ill, that was certain; but, considering the pain he suffered, not impatient; the source of greatest comfort to him was that he had seen his darling, about whom he was never tired of conversing. It was for her sake as a child that he had been tempted to commit the wrong he had; it was for her sake that he had come back—just to see her dear

face—and put himself in peril of the law.” In short, there was a something of feudal feeling in the gate-keeper—a worthy law-fearing man himself—which caused him to regard the offence of his old master in a very charitable light, and to defend him even against those least likely to be his accusers.

Once Mary ventured to ask her father whether the sick man seemed to be afraid of capture, or rather of the punishment that would result from it.

“For himself, child, he cares nothing—he fears nothing ; but rather than bring shame upon Miss Kate and Madam, he would kill himself—if it were necessary ; of that I am certain.”

“Kill himself?” cried Mary, shuddering. “That would be a worse crime than ——”

“How do *you* know?” cried the blind man angrily, smiting the stone floor of the parlour with his staff. “Hold your tongue, child, I beg.”



A week, a fortnight thus passed away without incident, when a certain letter came for Kate.

The communication was satisfactory, inasmuch as it conveyed no new alarms, but what struck Kate cold with terror was that the envelope had been tampered with: a certain simple detective apparatus which Maurice had adopted in the fastening of his dispatches revealed this to her at once.

By return of post Mr. Robinson was informed of this catastrophe. Two days afterwards—it was on a Friday—Kate received a hurried note—without one word of reference to the above important communication: “The port of London is too closely watched, and we are now at Liverpool, from whence he sails (*D. V.*) on Saturday. Directly he is safe off in the *Ariadne*, you shall hear.—Address, Maurice Glyn, Esq., 4, Elspeth Terrace, Liverpool.”

Here was food for wonder and apprehen-

sion indeed. Maurice could surely not have received her last intimation, or he would never have intrusted to the post so important a secret. It was indeed a complete revelation of his plans, which were now, without doubt, in the possession of her father's pursuers; for the envelope in this case also showed signs of having been opened since it had been fastened down.

Note in hand, Kate flew to the cottage: just as she reached the footpath which led to it through the wood, she met *the Bell* fly with that objectionable person, in rusty black, in it, evidently bound for the railway station: his smug countenance seemed to her to wear a look of malicious satisfaction. Her heart sank within her; her limbs could scarcely support her on her way.

"Dear Mary, look at this," cried she, giving her friend the letter at the cottage-door. "He knows nothing of the snare that is spread for him. All is lost!"



"Not yet," said Mary bravely. "Have confidence in Mr. Maurice Glyn. I have had a letter from him myself this morning, telling the same news with the same openness. True, he knows nothing of his letters having been tampered with, yet he is too wise, too cautious, to write like this without some reason ; I am certain of it. Why, it was only a day or two ago he warned me to beware of that man who has been troubling my father so about the brasses—as though *he* could hurt us ! He is on his guard, be sure."

Kate sighed. "What is that, Mary?"

"An advertisement that he enclosed, that's all ; the time of sailing of the *Ariadne*, A1, from Liverpool to Melbourne ; on Saturday, that is, to-morrow, at 8 A.M."

"He will never get on board," groaned Kate. "They will seize him hours before—— Stay, Mary ; all may be well yet."

How could I have forgotten it? There is the telegraph!"

"Ah! yes, there is the telegraph," echoed Mary, yet with none of her friend's triumphant excitement. "But I am not sure, Miss Kate, as to using that. Mr. Glyn said nothing about telegraphing. We had better stick to our orders: he laid—Mr. Glyn did—very strict injunctions upon father and me."

"But this is a case he could not possibly have foreseen, Mary. I shall go to the station at once;" and with that she rose and laid her hand upon the door.

"You will do as you please, dear Miss Kate. Yet, remember, if it is found possible to read letters in their passage through the post, how much more easy is it to read telegrams."

"I will shape the message so that no one can suspect its meaning."

"But the address, Miss Kate?"

"If what we suspect has happened, the address is known. I am resolved to do it;" and she opened the door.

"Then let me go with you," cried Mary, snatching up her bonnet and shawl; but she had to run to overtake Kate.

The road was at first shut in by trees, whose leaves were changing colour; then dipped down upon the desolate flat, over whose long grasses the sea-breeze was billowing, as though ocean itself still possessed the soil. Clouds of sand showed they were approaching the shore. Before them, close to a dismantled martello tower, and on the spot over which Duke William's Norman galleys had once sailed, stood the little station of the Coast Railway, from which Kate (quite regardless of these stupendous changes) was about to telegraph. She was well known to the station-master, who was also pointsman, porter, and electrician to this miniature establishment,



which consisted of one room. As she opened the door, this official was engaged at his desk. "Good morning, Mr. ——"

Before she could finish the sentence, he turned round, and she saw that he was a stranger.

"Mr. Mirk is on his holiday, ma'am, and I am doing his duty in the meantime," observed this personage respectfully. "Can I be of any service?"

"Don't telegraph, Miss Kate," said Mary in a hurried whisper. "I know this man; he comes from Swinlake—Sir Richard's railway station."

But she spoke too late; indeed, Kate was too flurried to listen.

"I wish to send a message to Liverpool," said she in anxious tones. "It is important. Can it go at once? What time will it get there?"

"It can go at once to London, ma'am; and will be in town in five minutes. As

to when it will be forwarded to Liverpool, I can't say."

Kate had produced her pocket-book, and was writing eagerly, for "forms" of despatch the little station did not possess.

"From Kate Irby, Blondel Parva, to Maurice Glyn, 4, Elspeth Terrace, Liverpool.—What you feared for your letters has happened; it is certain they know all. Not a moment to be lost. Flee!"

The women watched the countenance of the clerk as he read the words out. Mary secretly thought that it was not so impassive as is usual with such officials when upon duty, but what use was there in increasing Kate's anxiety, by mentioning this?

"Flee?" said the clerk, repeating the last word. "Is it 'Flee?'"

"That is right," answered Kate. "I

should like to see the message sent, if you please."

"Certainly, ma'am." The clerk began to work the machine—that cross between a beer engine and a barometer—standing, of necessity, with his back to the spectators. "Click, click ; rattle, rattle ; click, click."—"The charge is eighteenpence, ma'am," said he blandly, at the conclusion of his labours.

"Here is half-a-crown ; pray keep the rest for your promptitude," said Kate ; "and thank you."

"Really, miss ?" The clerk hesitated ; blushed a little, doubtless from modesty ; then pocketed the money.

The message he had really sent ran as follows :—

"From John Jackson, Blondel Parva, to Sir Richard Anstey, Eaton Place, London.—Miss Irby tells Maurice Glyn, at 4, Elspeth

*Terrace, Liverpool: 'What you feared for
your letters has happened; it is certain
they know all. Not a moment to be lost.
Flee!'* ”

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESERVED COMPARTMENT.

It is the Tuesday previous to the events narrated in the last chapter, and the mail-train is starting from the London terminus for Liverpool. There are not many passengers. It is too late in the year for town-folks to be travelling northwards for pleasure: the autumn has begun, and the wind is cold. One traveller, in particular, a tall grey-bearded man, but bent either with age or illness, shivers in the blast, notwithstanding his multitudinous wraps. He limps rapidly up and down, looking into the windows of the second-class carriages.

“What is it?” inquires a porter curtly, almost suspiciously.

"I was told there was a carriage here 'reserved' for me."

"Not *it*," says the porter, whose speech is redundant only to first-class folks; sharp and short to second-class; and peremptory—"T'other end of the train, *stupid*; get in with ye, can't ye?"—to the third.

"I know there *was* a carriage," persists the invalid, querulously.

"Any name?"

"Yes: Jones—no, Martin," ejaculates the other, correcting himself hastily.

"All right, sir; first-class, sir; this way, sir."

And the porter points to a well-cushioned compartment, with "Engaged" upon it. "Shall I look after your luggage, sir?"

"No, no. I haven't got any. A gentleman—that is, *another* gentleman—has charge of it."

"He had better be quick, sir; there's the five minutes' bell a-ringing."



"That's him : there—yonder—the man in the cloak. Tell him I'm here."

The porter made a dive among the hurrying crowd.

"Damme," muttered the sick man, "what a start! What a thing it is to be a swell! First-class! It's better than a bed; it's better than a tap-room. I wonder whether he will bring any brandy."

The man in the cloak—he has put its collar up, as if *he* also feels the cold—comes to the window.

"Are you all right, my good sir?"

"No; I'm devilish ill. I should like some brandy."

"I have a flaskful," replies the other, getting into the carriage.

The porter at the window touches his hat expectantly to the sick man. "I found the gentleman, sir."

"So I see. It was deuced clever of you, considering that I pointed him out."



The train begins to move: the glass is pulled up so sharply that it almost catches the porter's nose.

"It is particularly requested that no temptation in the way of gratuity be offered to the company's servants," roars the sick man through the pane, pointing to the notice-board bearing that inscription. Then, as the engine shrieks and yells, he leans back on the unaccustomed cushions, and bursts into a peal of malicious laughter.

"Hush, hush, my good sir," says his companion reprovingly.

"I can't help it," rejoins the other, much out of breath. "First class! Only think of it! O lor!"

Greatly tickled by this reflection, the old gentleman chuckles, until, being really very weak and unwell, he is upon the verge of choking. He is with difficulty understood to ask whether he is going *first-class* to Australia.



"No; I'm afraid we can't quite afford that," responds his companion. "But every care will be taken of you."

"Ah," replies the other with a wry face, "I'm used to that. Plenty of care—plenty of *watchfulness*. An attendant to walk out with one. Meals punctual. A private chaplain kept; likewise a medical adviser."

It is evident that these two persons do not now move in the same rank of life; although, perhaps, they may have done so at one time.

Their present mode of travelling is habitual with the second and much younger passenger; he rests his hat in the straps above him, and places his umbrella in the cradle—proceedings which, simple and natural though they be, elicit astonishment from the spectator.

"Blessed if I knew what they were for," says he.

"Well, you have been so long out at

elbows, you see, my friend, that these little luxuries are strange to you. But you'll soon get accustomed to them. They have all these things in Australia now, just as they have here."

"Ah," muttered the other disconsolately. "I haven't got there yet. I wish I was off."

"It will be all right, Mr. Martin, never fear. Your berth is taken. By Saturday night, there will be many a league of salt water between you and your—your friends. As soon as we have got into our snug lodgings, I shall write to those whom it concerns, and tell them where we are. They will scarcely believe the good news unless it's in print, so I'll cut out the advertisement. *The Ariadne from Liverpool to Melbourne at 8 A.M.*"

"I tell you *what*, Mr. Glyn," observed the old man admiringly; "you're a cunning one, *you are*. It's very lucky for us poor devils

that have to live by their wits that you are not a Peeler. The *Arryadne!* O lor, O lor!"

Perhaps the common tie between the two companions was a keen sense of humour; for the relish with which the invalid seemed to enjoy this joke (albeit *caviare* to the reader), was not a whit inferior to the pleasure derived from it by our old acquaintance, Mr. Maurice Glyn. He was the first, however to recover himself from his paroxysm.

"Do, pray, be careful, Mr. Martin," implored he: "you are not strong enough yet to laugh like that. You'll kill yourself. One would think your life was insured in three different offices."

And here, we are sorry to have to write, Mr. Glyn indulged in another chuckle, which, however, was not this time echoed by his aged companion. Perhaps he was, after all, not quite so dead to the stings of

conscience as he appeared. There ensued a lull in their merriment.

"When do I go on board?" inquired the old man, somewhat testily.

"Any time before 8 A.M., my good sir, as per advertisement."

"It's devilish early. But there; *my* comfort is not much consulted."

"You have been used to get up earlier," returned Maurice laconically. "Besides, you may sleep on board over-night, if you please."

"Not I. I hate it. I've been across the herring-pond before, you know."

"Just so. I wouldn't come back *again*, if I were you."

There was a sternness in Glyn's tone which contrasted curiously enough with his late high good humour.

"You are very pleasant, when you are pleased," observed the old man in gruff and sour tones.

“Ah.” That was all Maurice deigned to say; and it was said in a very unconciliatory manner; yet, if his travelling-cap had not been so tipped over his eyes, and his cloak drawn so high to meet it, the dim light from the lamp would have been sufficient to show his features once more wrinkled with violent laughter. “What a beast to tame!” murmured he to himself. “What tricks! How hard one has to hit him over the nose!”

It is now night. Nothing is heard but the roar and rush of the train, and the savage shriek of the engine, as it flashes through trembling stations, or buries itself in the heart of the hills. Neither Maurice nor his companion sleep; the one is too anxious; the other, anxious also, is too ill.

“Have you any brandy?” groans the latter. All the fun has fled from his haggard face, and given place to pain and unrest.

“Yes; no—why, I gave you the flask, did I not?”



"A mere thimbleful," answered the other contemptuously: "not a pint. There's a dog—a devil—tearing at my inside!"

"What can I do? Are you too hot?"

"Ay, red-hot: burning."

"Shall I open the window?"

"No; I shiver."

"Patience, my good sir: we shall soon be there. You will be better presently."

"Ay." It seemed as though that monosyllable contained the concentration of cynicism, scepticism, the very essence of bitterness—a gall-nut.

Maurice leaned forward and gazed into his companion's face. There was no answering look: the invalid had fainted.

"Unhappy wretch!" murmured the young man, as he let down the glass, and the black night rushed in. "Suppose he is not well enough to sail! Suppose he dies!"

CHAPTER VII.

SHIPS AND SHIPS.

It is Saturday morning—between six and seven o'clock—and the weather is what sailors denominate “dirty.” Not absolutely wet, but very likely to be so, with much wind, and yet much damp; altogether, by no means the sort of morning on which to enjoy a row on the Mersey. There is, however, a small boat upon its waters, carrying two passengers, one of whom at least gives the impression, by his air and manner, that he is there because he likes it. He is well wrapped up in costly raiment of sealskin; he has an excellent cigar in his mouth; he produces again and again from his pocket—once every two minutes—a gold repeater, and consults it with exulting face.

"We are in plenty of time."

"Plenty of time, Sir Richard," answers his companion, a thickset, tall, grave man, who has no weakness, absolutely none, except that "he will have his joke." He cultivates his gravity for the enhancement of his strokes of humour, and not at all because it is suitable to his serious and sober calling of inspector of police. When he has no repartee or epigram at hand (which happens oftener than he wishes), he repeats his words. "Plenty of time—plenty of time."

"Suppose he does not come at all, Mr. Inspector? Eh?" asked the man in seal-skin. His tone was that of a man so secure of his object that he can afford to imagine obstacles.

"Then we have got an appetite for our breakfast; that is all: he must be either here or there. The house is watched.—Yonder is the *Ariadne*, boatman, is it not?"

“There she rides, sir, as fine a ship as ever sailed. If you have taken passage in her—— But there; gentlemen like you would go by steamer; though, for my part, give me the old heart of oak, not an iron box as is as likely to bust up as not. However, that’s only *my* notion. The wind is agin her, no doubt, to start with, and there’s not many thinks with me, I know. They was telling me only yesterday that there wasn’t a dozen passengers agoing by her.”

“Are they all on board, boatman, do you reckon?” inquired the inspector.

“Well, no,” rejoined the tawny oarsman. “Shore-folks is always loath to start till they are obliged. But she will be off by eight with the first of the tide.”

The *Ariadne’s* deck was tolerably clear; as the boatman had said, there were but few passengers, and those, it seemed, had preferred to sleep on board, and had not yet

risen. At all events there was no sign of any very recent arrival ; and there were none but sailors to be seen—a hive of busiest bees without one drone.

“ Boat ahoy there ! What is it ? ”

“ We want to come on board.”

“ It’s too late. We can’t have strangers now. We’re off.”

“ There’s a passenger—a friend of mine—most important business,” ejaculated Sir Richard, in short sharp jerks, not very easy to catch in that driving wind. He was not accustomed, as the sea-captain was, to carry on a distant conversation through hollowed hands.

“ Write by the next mail,” roared the captain, “ and be ——” The latter part of the sentence was lost in the roar of the wind, the splash of the wave ; but its meaning was complete without it.

“ What are we to do ? ” asked Sir Richard hoarsely. “ I can’t make myself understood

in this cursed boat. By Heaven, we shall lose him."

"Captain Barker," exclaimed the inspector, in a voice of thunder, and without using his hands at all, "I have a warrant to search your vessel. You see this staff. Deny me at your peril."

"Why the Bay of Biscay" (let us say, though the captain referred to another locality) "did you not *say* so? Who the king of Siam" (it was another potentate that was invoked) "was to know you were thieftakers?—Come aboard."

"I must see your passenger-list."

"Here it is."

"And your passengers."

"Steward, show these gentlemen thieftakers the cabins. They had better make haste if they don't want to take a longer voyage than they have reckoned upon. There's nothing in this warrant to stop my sailing."



The inspector and Sir Richard accordingly overhauled every cabin, fore and aft. Some passengers were in their berths; some half-dressed; some already in the saloons at breakfast. The gentlemen were neither sick nor ancient; the ladies were not men in disguise. No one answering to the description of Robert Irby was to be found.

"I see some empty cabins, captain," observed the inspector when they came on deck again. "Did you expect more passengers?"

"What the Bay of Biscay is that to you?"

"This warrant says you are to render me every assistance, in the Queen's name. I ask you, were any more passengers entered on your list than these?"

"Yes, one; but he is too ill to come on board, and has forfeited his passage-money."

The inspector and Sir Richard exchanged glances.



"Sorry to have troubled you, captain," observed the former civilly, as he turned to step into the boat.

"Go to the king of Siam!" returned the unappeasable captain.

Before the boat had got well away, the cadenced sounds were heard of the men at the capstan bars. The anchor was weighed; the huge sails began to fill: the *Ariadne* had commenced her long ocean-journey.

"It's just as well as it is, Sir Richard," said the inspector, looking, not without curiosity, after this floating phenomenon, for his own business did not lie upon the deep waters. "We have our man safe enough, since he is too ill to move. *Quieta non movere*; I hope, by the by, he has not got his *quietus*."

"Ah, suppose he was to *die*!" returned the baronet, darkly. "To die, look you! What should we do then?" And the speaker clenched his teeth.

"Well, Sir Richard, being a relative, *you* would doubtless go into mourning." Never was joke let fall before a less appreciating audience. Mr. Inspector saw his mistake, and hastened to repair damages. "But he won't die, sir, not he," added he assuringly. "He knows a trick worth two of that."

There was silence until the boat touched the landing-stairs.

"Shall we breakfast first, Sir Richard—this wind gives me an appetite—or go straight to the gentleman's lodgings!"

"To Elspeth Terrace at once!" responded the young man fiercely. He was hungry also, but with a hunger not to be assuaged by tea and toast.

They had not far to go. Elspeth Terrace was an unambitious row of lodging-houses, close to the water-side. To say truth, it was affected by a class of persons who appreciate facilities for immediate and lasting change of quarters. Such folks, as a rule,



are long sitters, late risers, and not a blind of the upper windows had yet been raised throughout the long line of building, although it was near nine o'clock. Not even a housemaid was to be seen whitening a door-step, albeit it was Saturday, of all mornings in the week; and if that was not cleaning day in the Terrace, it was plain by the look of the stones that they knew none. The place exhibited no sign of life save the presence of one seafaring man, sauntering up towards them with a pipe in his mouth, on the river-side of the street, and occasionally contributing a mouthful of tobacco-juice to the Mersey.

"*That's* why the river is such a funny colour just about Liverpool," observed the inspector, with humorous reference to this incident.—"All right, my man."—"He has not good manners, that fellow, but he can be trusted, Sir Richard."

"Oh, I see that is your watchman."



“ Yes. In case it should have been better for us not to be seen talking with him, we have a little code of signals. That contribution to the Mersey means, being interpreted: ‘ All’s well; nobody has left the house this morning.’ But there was no necessity, it seems, for such precaution.—Don’t be excited, Sir Richard; don’t put yourself out.’

For Sir Richard was very pale, gesticulating with his hands at some imaginary object, and muttering to himself: “ Yes, I will do it; yes, I will. It is absolutely necessary for my own safety—yes, *my own*, since he was the witness—to have him proved to be a felon.”

A gentleman of title (or indeed without one) may be an offensive sneak, and yet have scruples. Conscience is not so easily eradicated as some theologians would have us believe; even railway contractors and persons connected with the turf, by the mere



virtue of their professions are not emancipated from its control. Complete freedom, as the poet truly remarks, is the slow result of time. At No. 10—that is, five doors off from the house whence Robert Irby was about to be transferred from a sick bed to jail—Sir Richard stopped short, and broke into a profuse perspiration.

“Look here, sir,” remonstrated the inspector, with the air of a disciple of M. Comte, who has been through all the moral stages, “I can see your little difficulty, and appreciate it. Those drops upon your forehead do you honour. I have been glad to catch hold of an area railing myself, when I was young at my trade. But just consider. This business is out of your hands, Sir Richard, and you can’t stop it. If it was not for the mere matter of identification, you might be miles and miles away. It is the law that is taking its course—not you. Now, don’t ask me—pray, don’t, sir—



whether any sort of arrangement can possibly be entered into, for I know that's upon the tip of your tongue. I think no worse of you for thinking on it, but I durstn't do it for a thousand pounds; no, sir, nor for ten thousand."

They walked on. The inspector thrust his hand into his coat-pocket, as though to make sure of the presence of some necessary article: it was there, and clattered against his fingers. He stepped up to No. 4, and lightly rang the bell.

A middle-aged woman, with a cross face, which she was wiping with her apron, answered his summons.

"You are the landlady of this house, my good lady, are you not?"

"Yes, sir, at your service."

"You have lately had a sick gentleman for one of your lodgers, I believe?"

"Sick, yes: gentleman, no. I don't call him a gentleman," returned the woman in



high-pitched tones ; “ and I only hope it will be made up to me for all the trouble I’ve had with him, and language such as I should be ashamed to give to a dog.” These remarks were directed not to the inspector, but point blank against the door of the sitting-room that opened from the lobby.

“ And you have another lodger in the house, have you not, madam ; one Mr. Maurice Glyn ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; quite a different sort of body, I’m sure. — This way, gentlemen.” She opened the parlour-door, and in walked the inspector, with Sir Richard close behind him ; while the seafaring man lounged on the opposite side of the way, with his back to the river.

Mr. Maurice Glyn was still seated by the breakfast table, but he had finished his morning meal, and was smoking his cigar. An open letter lay at his left hand ; but he



had done with that also, and was reading a Liverpool newspaper.

"To what am I indebted for this early visit?" inquired he, raising his eyebrows.—
"Of Sir Richard Anstey, I already know much more than enough; but as for *you*, sir, I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance. I may add, if you persist in wearing your hat in a gentleman's private sitting-room, that I don't covet it."

"I am an inspector of metropolitan police, sir, and my business is too urgent to admit of much courtesy," returned the other, reddening.

"Does it also prevent your friend from closing the door?" inquired Maurice calmly.
"I dislike to sit in a thorough draught."

"A view of the passage is indispensable, Mr. Glyn. I have a warrant here for the apprehension of Robert Irby, at present, I believe, an inmate of this house. It is a very serious matter, let me tell you, this

feigning of death to defraud insurance companies."

Maurice rang the bell, which the landlady, who was in hiding round the doorway, answered with most unwonted promptness.

"Mrs. Matthews, please to show these gentlemen up-stairs. They are in search of some lodger of yours, it seems, of whom I have never heard."

"Come, this is all nonsense, Mr. Glyn," exclaimed the inspector. "It does not signify twopence about the name he is going under. You know very well whom we want; and—if he is ill—why, wouldn't it be better, sir, that you should break it to him, and not that——"

"Oh, I see," interrupted Maurice; "you're afraid of the shock. That is most considerate, I am sure.—But—Irby, Irby—is not Sir Richard there connected with the family? Why does not *he* go? If the poor wretch of whom you speak is the man I

take him for, he is his own cousin—your own flesh and blood, Sir Richard. Mr. Inspector, your friend shivers. I told you we were in a draught.”

“Which room is this Irby, or whatever you call him, lying in?” inquired the inspector of the landlady.

“La! sir, Mr. Martin, for that was the name I knowed him by, he isn’t here; thanks be to goodness! He went away on Thursday, and never was I more glad, I must say—although he was Mr. Glyn’s own friend—to see a lodger’s back. A quart of brandy he took a day, sir, and it never did him no good, but always turned to bile and bad words.”

“Very good,” said the inspector, smiling, “and very natural, and does you a great deal of credit, ma’am; but we will just step up and see for ourselves, lest you should chance to be mistaken.”

“Mistaken!” echoed the landlady, follow-

ing up the stairs. "You mean that I am a liar, nothing less. Why, I helped to dress him myself to go aboard."

"Go aboard *what?*" inquired the inspector, making strict but fruitless search in every room.

"Why, the *Afrodeight*, to be sure, as started at six o'clock on Thursday, was luck to it: as though an hour or two could have made any difference when they was to be months on the way; putting folks to such an inconveniency as never was; and *he* a-cussing and a-swearing to the very last, just because the cab was short for his legs."

"So you are in search of my friend, Mr. Martin, are you?" observed Maurice, as the two visitors—the inspector cool and unruffled as ever, but Sir Richard wearing a very ugly look—having thoroughly explored the little house, returned to the passage, where the parlour-door still stood open. "If either of you wish to communicate with him,

gentlemen, I know his address, and shall be happy to forward your letters: he sailed by the clipper-ship *Aphrodite* on Thursday last."

"You have been aiding and abetting the escape of a Felon, sir—I suppose you are aware of *that*?" remarked the baronet, trembling with rage.

"If I have shocked *your* morality, Sir Richard Anstey, I must have sinned indeed," rejoined Maurice, sternly. "Traitor and coward! you thought that you were warring with a woman—one indeed to whom you owed a brother's part, but whom you strove to drag to ruin—but you have met your match and more. Robert Martin started eight-and-forty hours ago for Australia. You should thank me, if you have one spark of honour left, for having saved you from the shameful deed you meditated."

"Curse you, you dog!" cried Sir Richard;
"I will be even with you one day."



"I hope so," returned Maurice, coolly; "though at present you have had the advantage of me. There are three things I have set myself to do: first, to place this man in safety, between whom and his pursuers already lie five hundred miles of ocean. Secondly, to settle with your cousin's creditors'—— Yes, this is her handwriting; I see you recognise it; I shall write to-day to tell her how Sir Richard and his bloodhound were foiled. And thirdly, I have to settle accounts with *you*.—You grin; but I will do it, sir, believe me. Yet, when the time comes, I will not be merciless. I owe you something for which I am grateful. You have introduced me, in your own proper person, to the most heartless and pernicious villain that ever lay—I think you will understand the allusion—beneath the foot of an honest man."

Sir Richard did indeed wear a ghastly

grin; he strove to speak, but hate and fury fairly choked his utterance.

"Come away, Sir Richard, and don't argue with him," said the inspector, laying his huge hand upon the young man's arm; "come away, I say," added he, in a whisper. "I have hit upon a plan which may turn the tables yet."

Whiter than the whitewashed wall, Sir Richard staggered out of the doors and across the street, where his companion was already in conversation with the seafaring man.

"George," said he, "be off at once to the shipping office, and find whether an old man—an invalid—entered on the list as Mr. Martin, sailed by the *Aphrodite* last Thursday, and bring the news to our hotel.—You see, Sir Richard, we must first make sure that yonder gentleman, and perhaps even the lady, have not been lying. It is a common vice; they do it even at sea, for that man Barker lied to us about *his* sick passenger.



When we have made certain so far, the question is, Sir Richard, what are you prepared to spend in the prosecution of this business?"

"To catch this Irby? Anything! Thousands! But why speak of that, when all is lost, thanks to that meddling fool."

"Nay, nay," said the inspector, reprovingly, who with the young man's arm within his own was already striding swiftly towards the town. "Give the devil his due: it is the height of folly to underrate our foes. Mr. Glyn is no fool, but a very knowing card indeed—only just a little too exultant; it's excusable in so young a man, but it's an error. Now if he had confined himself to saying: 'The man you want sailed by the *Aphrodite* on Thursday,' I think he would have done us; I really do. But he must needs say 'clipper-ship:' that put the idea of comparative speed into my mind at once. Now, look you: the boatman told us that

the wind was dead against the *Ariadne*; it has been in the same quarter ever since the *Aphrodite* sailed, bound for Australia, likewise, so that she cannot have made much progress. Now, here's the riddle—it may cost you a thousand pounds or more, for what I know—but, 'What goes faster than a clipper-ship, Sir Richard?'"

"By Heaven, a steamer.'" "

"Just so. Don't stop; there is not a moment to lose, and remember, a stern-chase is a long chase, and perhaps we may miss her after all. But this is our last chance. Are you prepared to charter a steamer? "

"Yes, I am," cried Sir Richard; and if an oath is necessary to confirm an observation, that obligation was amply complied with.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAURICE GLYN'S SECOND PATIENT.

LITTLE dreaming of the new turn that affairs had taken, and not without many self-congratulatory chuckles over his baffled foes, Mr. Maurice Glyn packed up his trunk, and took the express train for London. His plans had been as yet entirely successful. It had been his object all along to keep Sir Richard informed of his journey to Liverpool, and of Mr. Martin's departure thence for the under world—only by no means to reveal the dates thereof. It was with the firm expectation of his letters being opened by other hands than those to which they were addressed, that he had written to Kate and Mary upon the Thursday, appointing Saturday for the day of sailing by the

Ariadne, whereas his man was already safely on board the *Aphrodite*. He had laid secret injunctions upon the gate-keeper's daughter to give the dealer in ecclesiastical brasses every possible opportunity of gleanings whatever information he (Maurice) should supply; but as soon as it was certain that his letters had been tampered with, he had the game in his own hands, and played with his antagonists as he pleased. He rightly judged that it was better not to inform Kate how matters stood: and her very natural anxiety and alarm, culminating in her earnest telegram, had worked together to blind the enemy and secure his own object.

One would have imagined since, according to his view, Kate's father was beyond pursuit, that there was now no further necessity upon Glyn's part for disguise or concealment; but this, to judge by his proceedings, seemed by no means to be the case. As



soon as the train reached its terminus, he hurried out of it, portmanteau in hand, and secured a cab: "To Old Broad Street, City," said he, in an imperious tone; "and drive quick." Then, as soon as he had cleared the corner of the street, "To Pall Mall," cried he: "I have altered my mind."

After getting some refreshment at his club, and leaving his luggage there, he went out. On the other side of the way, leaning against a lamp-post, was a man in a dreadnought coat, and wearing a "sou'-wester." Maurice walked across the street, and slapped this personage upon the back.

"Don't trouble yourself, my good fellow, to dog me, for nothing is now to be got by it. It is a saying of your own master's that a man should know when he was beat. Do you see?"

"I only do my duty, sir," returned the

man cheerfully, without the least attempt to deny the charge.

"Just so: your duty is your pleasure, is it? Well, if you follow me another step, I shall give you in charge to the police."

Maurice hailed a passing Hansom, and drove off at a rapid pace: the spy remained looking after him, disconcerted and irresolute. The inspector had given him no orders to risk publicity. In that minute interval the link was lost: the object of his pursuit had dived into the roaring depths of London, and was for the present trackless.

"If that fellow had had time and opportunity to disguise himself—but there; I suppose he did not guess I had my eye upon him in Elspeth Terrace—what a devil of a mess we might have been in!" soliloquised Maurice in his ark of safety. "It is plain that the suspicions of that prying bluebottle are not completely lulled. And yet—since he knows his man is on the road to Aus-

tralia—why *should* he have sent that fellow after *me* ? I feel like those interesting persons in Cooper's novels who are always being tracked by the crafty Mingoes, but, unlike them, I don't know how to conceal my trail. One had need to be a woodcock. Yes ; I have all the necessity of the cuttlefish for a modest seclusion, but without his natural gifts."

Maurice had told the cabman to stop at Clapham Common, where he got out and walked. Upon that extensive prairie it was easy to see whether he was followed or not ; and the result of his observations made him feel tolerably secure. A few minutes' sharp walking brought him to a small one-storied villa residence, very quiet and retired all the year round, except upon that great movable festival of the English Church which is called the Derby Day. Then Clapham, that city of the saints, becomes, as everybody knows, a moving spectacle.



After one anxious glance at an upper window. Maurice rang the bell. A decent widow woman, with that kind but weary face which more often consorts with widowhood than it is the fashion to credit, answered his summons.

"I am right glad to see you back again, sir. I was getting very anxious. The poor gentleman ——"

"Well, what?"

"Well, sir—I don't like to be the bearer of bad news ——"

"O yes, you do, my good lady," said Maurice smiling. "It is one of the few pleasures you have left to you in this world; but you enjoy it. You are one of the speculators for the fall."

"Heaven bless you, sir, I never speculated in my life! What I always said to my poor dear husband was: "Be careful, John: we have but a little: let us keep it. If he had only listened to me!"

"Yes, he was a Bull; you were a Bear."

"Lor, Mr. Glyn!"

"Never mind me.—Now, without exaggeration, is our friend up-stairs much worse?"

"Yes, sir, much. I've seen a deal of sick folks, and never one so bad as he—leastways, who got over it."

"Is he quite sensible?—in his right mind?"

"To-day, he is, sir. But he has been very flighty. Of course *I* don't mind, poor body; but he called the lassie 'Katie,' and that frightened her, and so I attend upon him myself now. O sir, I fear—from other things he said—the poor dear gentleman has got something on his mind. There's Mr. Ebenezer Whiffles—a good man, sir—who would come at a moment's notice, if you thought it would be any comfort."

"Not now, Mrs. Gresham, thank you ;"



and Maurice pushed her gently on one side, for she was barring his progress.

"O sir," answered she earnestly, "don't say 'Not now;' there is no time like the present."

"You're a good soul, I do believe," said Maurice, as he went noiselessly up-stairs. The door on the landing stood ajar, as the widow had left it—having perceived from the window Mr. Glyn's approach—when she went to answer the bell. The little drawing-room had been turned into a bedroom, to accommodate not only the sick man, but his friend, who was wont to spend most of his time in the same apartment, at his desk.

"What news, Mr. Glyn?"

Upon the scrupulously clean French bed, his head carefully propped up by pillows, and with a glass of some cooling liquid within reach of his hand, lay the gaunt form of the outcast and wanderer, Robert Irby.

"The very best of news: I have seen you safely off to Australia."

"Thank you, sir. I have no repayment to offer except that of ceasing to trouble you. You will soon see me start for a longer voyage than across the world, I hope."

"You must keep up your spirits, Mr. Irby; you kept them when things looked much blacker than they do now. The hounds are thrown off the scent, and you need have no apprehensions for your personal safety; or rather," added he as the sick man shook his head, with a grave smile, "for those whom your capture would compromise. That is surely a great step gained."

"Yes, indeed."

"You should have seen your substitute—a gentleman with a great command of strong language, and a great capacity for strong drinks. I had no end of trouble with him; and really, when it came to the last, although



Mr. Jones had, I know, very excellent reasons for departure from his native land, I could hardly get him on board ship. How curious it was that I should have come across him——” Maurice stammered and stopped.

“In the very place where you first met me, Mr. Glyn? Not at all. We are wretches of the same class. You will find half-a-dozen such in any London Refuge for the Destitute, ready and willing to put the sea between them and all they know, for the price of their passage. O Heaven! if you had seen what I have seen of this world's wretchedness—self-produced or otherwise, that is another question—if the parsons knew it, they would not be so puzzled as they are to picture hell.” The sick man spoke vehemently, but with painful effort; a fit of coughing seized him as he finished, and tore him like some evil spirit. It was frightful to behold.

“You must not talk, Mr. Irby. You excite yourself too much.”

“You warn me wisely, Mr. Glyn, not to waste speech. I am a hunted man, and scant of breath.”

“Well, well, the dogs are at fault, for the present, at all events.”

“Let us hope so, Mr. Glyn; thanks to you; and if not, still thanks to you. It is time for me to tell you something—which may be much to you some day.”

“Not to-day, Mr. Irby; you are too weak.”

“I shall be weaker to-morrow; nay, I may be dumb for ever. Listen to me. Has it never struck you that this Richard Anstey persecutes me with a malice greater than what is begotten of a rejected suit?”

“He is a devil,” cried Maurice, rising and pacing the room; “and when my hands are free, let him look to himself.”

The sick man followed him with eager



eyes and a grim smile. "He *is* a devil: you are right there. But it is not solely because he would have married Kate, and cannot, that he seeks to drag her down to ruin through her father's shame: it is something more than revenge which prompts him."

"What, then?"

"Fear. When I returned to Blondel, months ago, to see my darling—to take one look at Kate—I see you blame me for it; and I do not wonder: but, sir, there was once a man condemned for life to the Bastille, and buried in some pit beneath the ground, who counterfeited death, and lay for days without food, solely that they might take him out for one brief minute (believing him to be a corpse), and show him the blessed sun. That was my case, sir; Kate was the sun to me; my own, my darling—— And Susan, too, she was a good wife to me, and thought me honest. Pray, don't tell Susan,

sir." The sick man feebly turned his face to the wall and wept.

Maurice, deeply moved, kept solemn silence.

"When I returned to Blondel," continued the sick man presently, "I went to Joseph Grange's cottage for news of Susan—she that used to be my wife—and Kate. I did not know for certain whether my darling was alive or dead. From Joseph, a faithful friend, Mr. Glyn—who recognised in me him whom none with eyes could see—I learned all: he told me of Kate's being wooed by Richard Anstey, and of his uncle's dangerous illness. Sir Nicholas and I had once been friends, but we had quarrelled. He had defrauded me of a large sum of money: and partly with a view of getting speech with him, and urging him to make me recompense through Kate, and partly to see Richard—the man they told me was to wed my darling—I went off the next morning to



Anstey Court. I knew the place well, and managed to conceal myself close to the house. It was my intention to get within, and somehow to reach Sir Nicholas's room, but peering in at the window of a ground floor chamber, I came face to face with the very man I sought. Death was written on his features even more plainly than you read it now on mine; but I could see he recognised me, and fumbled for the bell-rope that lay beside him. Then I fled away and hid. But the same night I watched again at the open window, when Sir Nicholas and his nephew were alone, and I heard——
What's that?"

"Nothing; only a cab driving by."

"Close the door, and lock it. We must not be interrupted. I must finish now; I fear it may be too late an hour hence."

Maurice obeyed him softly.

"That's well.—I heard Sir Nicholas beseech his nephew to see Katie righted; and

I heard him promise that he would do so. Anstey had left her something in his will, but not enough."

"Nay ; there was no will," said Maurice, gently.

"There *was*—there *was*. I saw with my own eyes, Sir Richard—for he was Sir Richard then, although the breath was scarce out of his uncle's body—I saw him burn it."

"Burn the will !" cried Maurice, aghast.

"Ay, he burned it—I am not the only felon in the world—and while it was on the fire, he looked into the glass upon the mantelpiece, and saw the reflection of my face. Then I plunged into the laurels, and made my way out of the place at once."

"But in that instant, did he recognise you ?"

"I doubt it ; but—perhaps Sir Nicholas had told him of what *he* had seen—he had certainly suspicions : they were verified, of course, when he saw me afterwards (stricken



by this sickness, else I should have been far enough away) at Grange's cottage. He knows that it was I who was the witness of his fraud, and seeks to prove me felon, so that my testimony, should I venture to offer it, may go for nothing. You see now why I am a hunted man."

"I do indeed. The villain! This news of yours at least warns us to expect no mercy; though, I fear, we can make no use of it."

"At present, none," gasped the sick man. "But when I am dead — not now — ask Joseph — Joseph Grange — the summer-house — he knows" — the voice that had been growing feebler every moment, quavered and sank to nothing, though the lips still framed "he knows — he knows." But for that movement, so imperceptible was the flutter of the pulse, one would have thought the man was dead.



CHAPTER IX.

THE FLICKER OF THE CANDLE.

AMONG the many questions which neither priests nor philosophers can answer, there is this one: Why so often is poor humanity permitted to linger on its last couch, shorn of all attributes that elevate it above the beasts, nay, sunk below them, a senseless, yet dwindling log? Vitality indeed it has, since it does not decay; but life it has not, only lethargy, that sooner or later will be exchanged for death. Why this uneasy slumber on the chair as the night draws on, when the bed—our proper resting-place—awaits us, and since to bed we must go at last? If there is any faculty of sensation left, it is the dim perceptibility of pain—discomfort; if any ability to think, it is the



vague and kaleidoscopic memory of by-gone things ; but usually " He feels *no* pain, he knows nothing of what is passing about him," is the doctor's verdict, and we, the watchers, are glad to think it is so. It must surely be for our sakes that he lies thus—careless of love and hate, unproductive, useless, a clog upon the wheels of others' time—yet the object of loving vigilance, of unselfish endeavour. For days and days thus Robert Irby lay utterly prostrated by the recital recorded in the last chapter ; but his iron frame still held the captive life.

Maurice had written to Kate from Liverpool, telling her that all was safe, and she had besought him, in reply, to come and see her, and tell her all.

But he could not leave his dying patient, and dared not tell her how matters stood. She would be hurrying up to town, he knew, if once she heard her father was still in England and a dying man ; and what excuse



could be made to her mother, and what suspicion might not such a proceeding arouse in those who were, for all he knew, still keeping watch upon her movements. "I am engaged," he wrote, "in arranging with the insurance companies;" but his delay in that matter was of course unintelligible to her, and she chafed under it. "When I am poor as it becomes me, a music-teacher, a sempstress—I care not what—I shall be content," she wrote, "but not till then. Our present competence is loathsome to me, and seems nothing less than crime." This, mingled with passionate apprehensions upon her mother's account (the only hold which Maurice had upon her, and the sole ground on which he besought her patience), was her constant cry.

Now, until Robert Irby was dead, nothing definite could possibly be arranged with the insurance companies; the unconditional surrender of all Mrs. Irby and her daughter



possessed would have availed nothing. But although Maurice could not afford to be frank with the secretary, he cultivated his acquaintance; for, as he well knew, though relationship is one of the greatest obstacles to the settlement of business affairs, personal intimacy, on the contrary, smoothes the way. The official, on his part, spoke almost as guardedly as Maurice, so that it was difficult for the latter to guess how far he had been put in possession of the facts of the case by Sir Richard; although something, it was certain, he knew, or how could the warrant have been issued on the part of the companies for Irby's arrest?

There came, however, a certain day, when Maurice, having left his charge in the hands of Mrs. Gresham for a few hours, looked in upon the secretary, and found him in a state of great perturbation.

"Look here, Glyn, my good fellow," said he, as soon as he had cautiously closed the

glass-door of his sanctum, "we have known one another at college, and it's deuced disagreeable to have to forget all that, but I must do it. Hitherto, we have been doing our best to arrange a certain matter which has always been nameless, for the mutual benefit of your friends and my employers; but since I saw you last, something has happened: I am not at liberty to tell you what, but which renders their interests diametrically opposite—antagonistic. Do I make myself intelligible to you, Mr. Glyn?"

"Yes. It is the chivalry of the duello. 'I am about to run you through if I can,' is what you mean; 'draw, sir; defend yourself.'"

"Just so; that's it, Glyn. I must not talk to you any more on this, until all is settled, one way or the other. Good morning."

"What on earth has happened? What *can* it be?" mused Maurice as he walked



slowly Clapham-wards scarcely knowing whither he went.

Mrs. Gresham, with uplifted finger, met him at the house-door before he could ring the bell.

"Pray come up at once, sir," whispered she. "The poor gentleman is going at last, I do believe."

"Thank God!" returned Maurice fervently, thinking of the unknown peril which had just been hinted to him.

"Indeed, sir, it will be a happy release. He has asked for you, and seems to crave for something—not food nor drink—I cannot tell what he wants."

The sick man was looking more wan and white than ever, but there was speculation in his eyes. They roved about him as though seeking for something, and his fingers opened and shut as though they would have grasped it.

"It is the flicker of the candle, you see,

sir," said the landlady with reference to **this** last sign.

Maurice bent down and listened beside the twitching lips.

"Katie, Katie!" and the craving of eye and hand was terrible to witness: it **was** like seeing a man starve to death when one has no food to give him.

"What *can* he want? What *can* we get him?" cried the landlady, wringing her hands.

A sudden thought struck Maurice. He took down from the watch-pocket at the bed's head a little jet bracelet, and placed it in the sick man's hand. A satisfied smile lit up the wasted features as the thin fingers took their burden to the pallid lips.

"Dear heart, if the poor gentleman is not a Roman!" ejaculated the landlady with horror and pity.

And indeed the dying man kissed and mumbled the precious bracelet, exactly as a

devotee would treat the relics of his patron saint, or the blessed symbol of his future hope.

There was a sharp and sudden ring at the house-bell.

"That is the bell for saddling," exclaimed the sick man in low but distinct tones. "I'll take ten to one *Pyrrhus* wins."

"Now he's on the racecourse!" whispered Mrs. Gresham, lifting up her hands. "Oh, why didn't we send for Mr. Whiffles!"

A cab drove up hastily to the door, and the bell was rung more violently than before.

"Now they're off!" cried the sick man, raising himself upon one elbow. "*King Pyrrhus* wins." Then fell back upon the pillow.

The door below was opened, and there was a turmoil in the little hall below. Then heavy footsteps came quickly up the stairs.

"Where is he?" asked a voice in angry tones.

"He is here, Richard Anstey," answered Maurice sternly.

"I hold a warrant for your apprehension, Mr. Irby," said a tall grave man, following close upon Sir Richard's heels.

Maurice pointed to the bed. Another's warrant had gone forth beforehand, whose jurisdiction extends over the whole world; and a hand stronger than that of the law was laid upon him it sought. It was not King Pyrrhus that had conquered, but King Death. Robert Irby was a dead man.

"I arrest the body," said the inspector in formal tones. And accordingly he took possession.

CHAPTER X.

“DOWNRIGHT MADNESS, NEPHEW MAURICE.”

MAURICE betook himself at once to the insurance office, but the secretary had gone home. Now, in ordinary cases, there would for the present have been nothing further to be done. The mystery men call “business” is commonly only celebrated in its own peculiar temples, and at appointed times. Its priests are then in waiting with the expression of countenance suitable to its solemn rites ; but after the canonical hours, the mysterious cult ceases. Without the ledger and the pigeon-holes, and the high-stooled clerks on guard in the ante-chamber, it is an impiety to transact affairs. We are getting, it is true, somewhat latitudinarian in this respect, but the process is a slow one. The

Yaukee (*sagax rerum*, too), with his cigar in his mouth, and lounging in his rocking-chair, is still regarded by the orthodox British man of business as the freethinker is regarded by the ritualist. But since Maurice was personally acquainted with the secretary, the matter in hand could still be pursued, notwithstanding the solemn hour of 4 P.M. had tolled.

"You have got your man," said Maurice quietly, as soon as he was closeted in the official's study.

"I expected we should," answered the secretary, without a trace of triumph. "You were tracked home when you left the office this afternoon. I did all I could for you short of a direct warning; but even if you had been more cautious, it would have been only a matter of sooner or later. The inspector—the man we have always employed in these cases—felt that his reputation was at stake. What a dance you led him!

though, to do him justice, he was not without his suspicions of you all along. I never saw a man so put out as when he arrived from Liverpool two days ago.”

“Two days? Two weeks, you mean.”

“No, I don’t. Is it possible that you are not aware that he—or rather some person who is equally interested with ourselves in the capture of this Irby—chartered a steamer, and went in pursuit of the *Aphrodite*?”

“Bless my soul!” ejaculated Maurice.

“They did not do *that*,” returned the secretary, “I do assure you, but quite the reverse. They had the most infamous weather, and were sea-sick day and night. Our poor inspector is still green. However, they came up with the chase at last, and went on board. In the list of passengers, there was the invalid Martin, of whom they were in search. They went down into his cabin—and lo, he was not their man after all! The inspector had had to do with him,

it seems, under the name of Jones in other matters, but he was in no way connected with this one. Imagine the voyage home of our trusty detective, and the feelings which he entertains towards you and your—— I mean the gentleman he has caught to-day.”

“It’s not much of a catch, Mr. Secretary. The man of whom you speak—Robert Irby—is dead.”

“Dead!—Nay,” continued the other with a smile, “the company will be a little suspicious about that. You see he has died once already—ten years ago—when his funeral expenses cost us alone five thousand pounds.”

“However, he is dead now, for certain, as your own people will inform you,” proceeded Maurice; “they are indeed in possession of the body. Now, I came to you before the next board day—which I understand is to-morrow—in order that you may place before the directors the actual state of the case. I



do not deny (although, remember, it has still to be *done*) that the identification of this man Irby may be established in due course, and that you may recover the whole of the property of which his innocent widow and daughter are possessed.”

The secretary smiled.

“They are as innocent as you are yourself, I give you my solemn word and honour. The widow is to this day utterly ignorant that her husband was not drowned. The daughter is above all things desirous to give up all they have, unreservedly and at once. She could not do it—I myself would not permit it—when the doing so would have necessitated the public exposure of her father’s guilt. But now——”

“My dear Glyn,” returned the secretary impressively, “I know what you are about to urge; but it is too late. The board is naturally indignant—some members of it are furious—at the fraud which has been so suc-

cessfully practised upon us : they will, I am sure, insist upon punishment—as far as shame can punish—as well as restitution.”

“What! the punishment of the innocent?”

“They have a public duty to perform, my dear sir, and they will do it; and even if they would not, there are two other companies who have been imposed upon in a similar shameful manner. I honestly tell you that not even the immediate and unconditional restitution of what little those unfortunate ladies may be possessed of will avail to stay criminal proceedings.”

“I did not know companies were so public-spirited as to gratify their sense of duty at so great a cost,” said Maurice, rising.

“Cost! my dear sir,” returned the secretary: “the difference of expense between these poor folks giving up possession and our taking it, is not worth consideration.”



“I was not alluding to that,” said Maurice, carelessly, “but to your reckless disregard of your own interests; but if the board of directors are inexorably resolved upon their course of action, there is nothing to be said.”

“Our own interests? My dear sir, I don’t understand you.”

“Because I have not explained. What I was about to say was this: By taking the course you propose, instituting criminal proceedings, and bringing public shame upon these unfortunate persons, you will acquire, say, five thousand pounds. That is the sum-total of their property.”

“Just so. The united companies will even then have lost, including the interest of the sum of which they were originally defrauded, at least fifteen thousand pounds.”

“But if a friend of the family should offer to pay another five thousand pounds—

I mention the exteme limit to which his means extend—on the proviso that the proceedings are not made public, I say if the entire ten thousand pounds should be paid up within three months, what would the united companies say *then*? Mind, the name of Irby is never to appear in print: it need not even be mentioned in the discussion at all; and if the matter gets wind, I at once withdraw my offer.—Come, consider. Vengeance is sweet to flesh and blood; but in the case of a board—of *three* boards—don't you think that five thousand pounds would be sweeter?"

"It is a delicate matter," said the secretary, musing. "It has always been our practice to act from a sense of public duty."

"Five thousand pounds is a large sum," observed Maurice, quietly, as he took up his hat.

"I will lay your proposition, in cautious

terms, before the board, Mr. Glyn. If the man were alive, it would be compounding a felony; and I must say even now, it's uncommonly like offering us hush-money. Good-bye, sir.”

“It was fortunate that I called upon my friend before the directors met,” mused Maurice, as he left the house, well pleased. “To-morrow would perhaps have been too late for compromise. Supposing they accept the terms, there is still that scoundrel, Sir Richard, to be dealt with. It is scarce possible, however, that he will dare show his malice so openly as to brand his own kith and kin with guilt, if the companies are content to keep silence. If he does, there is still his destruction of the will to work with. *Mens sibi conscia*—— No; that's not it. A mind conscious of ill-doing can afford to despise no menace. I wonder what was *in* that will—what the villain gained by burning it?” Here the association of ideas

carried his thoughts into another channel. "Poor Aunt Rachel! I hope it is not permitted her to know that all her frugal savings are destined for the maw of an insurance company! 'Downright madness, Nephew Maurice!' How well I can fancy the good old soul clasping her mittens and saying that! Kate must never know about it: it must be kept from her as strictly as the knowledge of her husband's crime must be kept from her mother—a far more difficult matter. 'Don't tell Susan,' said poor Irby. Whatever a man does, I suppose he trusts his wife may still think well of him; or if that is impossible, he trusts she may never know his misdeeds. Doubtless, now, Madam has a picture of this man in her heart, made up of all the pleasant features of the original; a hearty, high-spirited, open-handed man, who, though a trifle self-willed, has a sound heart. Well, God willing, she shall carry it to her grave.—Five thousand pounds!



That will leave me about five hundred to begin the world with; quite a fortune at my age. I must work a little harder, that's all.”

CHAPTER XI.

MADAME DÉSHABILLÉE.

THE night after Mr. Glyn's interview with the secretary saw Maurice once more at Blondel Parva. He had been detained in town so late by important business, that, on arriving at the little station, he dispatched his luggage to the Vicarage to give notice of his intention to sleep there, while he himself hurried to the manor-house. Most of its inmates—"Early to bed and early to rise" was Madam's precept to her domestics—had already retired to rest. There was not a light to be seen, except in Kate's boudoir-window.

She was sitting at the table—its books unheeded before her, the harmonium closed, the flowers, once so carefully tended, dead



and withered—leaning her head upon her hands, past tears, and almost past prayers. Maurice knew all that, although he only beheld her shadow on the blind.

He rang the door-bell very softly, resolved, if his first summons was not answered, to go to the Vicarage, and defer his visit till the morrow. But hardly had the faint tingle ceased, when the sounds of shuffling feet were heard across the hall. The single bolt was withdrawn, and before him, in easy slippers, a garment which *might* perhaps have been a very old-fashioned dress, but had a strong family likeness to a dressing-gown, and bearing a flat candlestick in her hand, stood Madam herself.

“My dear Mrs. Irby, I fear I am very late.”

“Not a word, my dear Mr. Glyn. You are welcome here at all times—and never more than now. Excuse my appearance; I know I’m a Guy; but I was sitting by the

fire—the only one up in the house—and says I to myself: I'll go at once, whoever it is, or else they'll be ringing again, and—in case, please God, she may be asleep—waking my darling.” And here the good lady burst into tears.

Maurice closed the door very softly, and in hoarse, anxious tones inquired: “Is she ill?”

Madam shook her head—in a far sadder way than that which implies a simple negative—and led the way into the drawing-room, where the fire was yet burning. “She is not ill,” sighed Mrs. Irby, “in a mere physical sense—at least so the doctor tells me—but she is wasting away, and that is the truth of it. You would scarcely know her, Mr. Glyn; alas, alas! my pet, my beauty!”

“She never wrote me a word of this,” groaned Maurice—“not a word.”

“No; nor would she let me write, though

I said I thought you ought to know, and that your coming down would do her good. She has such fancies, too—poor darling—and that's as bad a sign as any. When I propose this and that to do her good: some little delicacy, it may be; or, as yesterday, when I wanted to take her to the Isle of Wight or Devonshire, for change of air, and told her how nicely we were living within our income, and how well we could afford it, she got into quite a state, Mr. Glyn; declared that she did not need expensive things, nor any change; that, on the contrary, she wished she were poor, and obliged to work hard for her living and mine. Think of my Katie working, poor dear girl, and hard! Although, for my part, I had rather see her doing *that*—ay, that I would—than pining away, as she does now."

"It would indeed be far better so, dear Mrs. Irby," said Maurice thoughtfully.

"There are many things worse than being poor."

"There are some, no doubt, Mr. Glyn," assented Madam. "Without health, for instance, what are riches? or without a good conscience? Well, it can't be *that* which disturbs my Katie; she never did a bit of harm in her life, bless her—at least not to be called harm. Always the best of girls, my dear sir, even when she was a child. Her poor dear father—not one that you would call a fondly foolish man neither, although, indeed, he had a world of good in him as folks in general did not dream of—quite idolised her. Some wives would have been jealous, I do assure you. I was nothing compared with her: it was all 'Katie, Katie,' with him; and she deserved it, bless her; and Robert was quite right. Oh, Mr. Glyn, do you think God will ever have the heart to take her from me?"

The very selfishness of the mother's agony

had an infinite pathos: she had clean forgotten that she was speaking to her daughter's betrothed—the man who had an equal right with her to say, “My Kate.”

There was silence for some moments. Madam's face was hidden in her handkerchief. Maurice was staring at the fire with aching eyes.

“Can I see Kate?” inquired he presently. “The candle is alight in the boudoir; she has not yet gone to her room.”

“I daresay; she scarcely ever sleeps,” said Madam sadly. “I have watched, night after night, and softly stepped along the passage, and the light has streamed out through the keyhole until two, three, and four in the morning. Why, it tries *me*, Mr. Glyn. And only think of my sweet darling! No wonder she comes down to breakfast looking like a ghost.”

“Can I see her, dear madam?”

“Yes, surely: you have a right, sir—

which, pardon me, I had almost forgotten. I will go and fetch her; nay, better, you shall see her alone."

"God bless you, Madam." There was that in the good lady's face, which, notwithstanding the uncommon singularity of her apparel, would have extorted deeper reverence from Maurice Glyn than any pontiff in his robes. He took her honest homely fingers in his own, and carried them to his lips.

"You have a good heart," sobbed she, "dear Mr. Glyn."

CHAPTER XII.

AN INNOCENT CONSPIRACY.

MADAM, never incapacitated by emotion for the fulfilment of domestic duties, had lit a couple of candles upon the mantelpiece, so that Maurice was not dependent for light upon the fitful fire-gleams. He could observe, with more or less distinctness, all objects in the huge, sparely furnished room. He saw that the vases which he had presented to the house had fresh flowers in them, notwithstanding the lateness of the season ; perhaps he flattered himself that they were thus tended for the sake of the giver.

At yonder window he had sat by Kate Irby's side, not many weeks ago, the happiest of men : it was the beginning of that life of bliss which had lasted for him some



twelve hours, for her not six ; for she had received Sir Richard's letter within that space of time after the acceptance of Maurice's suit. What an inconceivable change had come about since then ! How irreconcilable with justice, how antagonistic to mercy, seemed this visiting of the sins of the father upon his innocent child, upon Madam, nay, upon himself, Maurice Glyn ! Well, no, not upon himself. Quite independently of religious humility, few men, I think, with any sense, I do not say of modesty, but of fairness, feel in a position to rail at Providence or fortune when matters come off cross and contrary to their reasonable expectations in their love affairs. In their dealings with the fair sex, men get the best of the bargain ninety-nine times out of a hundred. In one particular (and in one only) they resemble the author, in that well-known arrangement between author and publisher which is called half-profits ; the other party takes all the risk.

When, indeed, a man is downright married—hooked—he sometimes pays for all; but “I have had fifteen per cent. for my money all my life,” says the philosophic speculator, “and I ought not now to grumble because this individual investment turns out a total failure.” As to being jilted, or deprived, through circumstances over which he has no control—as in Maurice Glyn’s case—of the object of his affections (*the* object he has the effrontery to term it, as though he had never had any other), he is, in my opinion, quite unjustified in saying anything more than: “Well, it’s hard lines; but I daresay I deserve it.” And I daresay he does.

To do Maurice justice, it was of Kate’s misfortune, and of Madam’s, that he thought most; perhaps, indeed, he secretly imagined his own not altogether irremediable; but for a man (as has been shown, I think), he was singularly unselfish.

Her step was coming across the hall; her



fingers were on the door-handle. Would she really be so greatly altered as her mother had said?

“Kate, dear Kate!”

“Dear friend, dear Maurice!”—like a ghost, indeed, and not a lover, she met him, and clasped his hand in both of hers—“how can I thank you for all that you have done? If the prayers of the fatherless avail, as it is said they do, surely *my* prayers, who am worse than fatherless——”

He took from his breast-pocket the little jet bracelet which had once been hers, and placed it in her hands without a word.

“He is dead, then? Alas, alas!” And she wept bitterly. “When did it happen, Maurice? How? Where? At sea?”

“No, Kate.” They sat down side by side, and he told her all. Yet not quite all: his stratagem and its temporary success—but not its after-failure. He did not tell her of the watch kept by the law on her dead

father—only that all was discovered, but that he was out of reach of harm; nor did he speak of her cousin Richard's crime. She had suffered enough unearned shame already.

"Is their vengeance to be carried beyond the grave, Maurice? Must my poor mother—must his Susan know?" for he had mentioned the dying man's last wish.

"I hope not; I think not, Kate. The insurance companies will not prosecute—that is the business I have been about all day, and which has detained me to this late hour—if there is an unconditional surrender of all you have within three months."

"Do they know how little that is, Maurice?" asked she, anxiously. "Five thousand pounds—I have found out how much exactly—and a few odd hundreds."

"They will of course make strict inquiry, Kate; but when they know they have got all, the directors will be content."



"God bless them! Thank them for me, Maurice—thank them! Oh, if they could but know what I have suffered, they would pity as well as spare."

"They have spared, Kate, and that is as much as can be expected of—of a board," said Maurice, grimly. "They have consulted their own interests at least as much as yours. I mean, if you were not inclined to give them all," added he, hastily, "they would have trouble—at all events, law expenses and what not."

"Oh, don't say so, Maurice. They are very merciful.—But Richard, what will he do?"

Maurice Glyn's brow darkened.

"I have written to your cousin: I have put before him certain reasons. I do not think that he will dare molest you further."

Kate sighed, and shook her head.

"He is a bad man, Maurice—I did not know how bad till lately."

"I *did*, Kate. He is bad indeed, but not bold. I think that you are safe from him. Dismiss him from your thoughts. You are safe, too, as regards the insurance offices. But we have one great difficulty before us yet—I do not speak of the comparative poverty that awaits you——"

"The total penury, you mean, Maurice," interrupted Kate. "Let us call things by their proper names. I do not fear it; I shall be happier by a thousand times when I am teaching, stitching—whatever my feeble hands can do. But O Maurice, my mother!"

"Yes, dear Kate, that is our difficulty—a very pressing one, but still our only one. We must never tell her the real truth."

"It would break her heart, friend—if not on her own account, on mine. Her husband's memory is sacred to her; but doubly sacred because he was my father. You don't know how she loves me. If she knew her Katie was a—a felon's child—God forgive me

for so speaking of him!—it would kill her!”

Maurice was silent; he would have given very much (had he anything left to give) to spare the good, kind woman; but he had thought the matter over a hundred times without any plan occurring to him. How could poor Madam be reduced to beggary without her asking why men took her goods? Yet, if she could not, what a new vista of wretchedness lay before this unhappy girl! A hard life—a life without luxuries or refinements—Mrs. Irby seemed not ill fitted for, nor incapacitated from taking her own portion of the burden. But much of this vigour might be owing—nay, certainly *was* owing—to the pride she took in her for whom she worked—her Katie. Her housewifely habits, indeed, seemed native to her, but much of her diligence was the labour of love. Her knowledge of the family shame would not, indeed, affect her love, but it might destroy

her pride in its object, and break the main-spring of all her actions. Maurice beheld her old before her time, decrepit, a helpless, and, what was worse, a depressing charge; as though a driving-wheel should suddenly become a clog. Perhaps he did Madam wrong; she might have bowed her head to the present trouble, but in time uplifted it, and become the mainstay that she had been of old, and with thrice her former use. But what ran in his thoughts ran in Kate's also, and she knew her mother well. Moreover, the dying man's "Pray, don't tell Susan, sir," weighed with them both.

"I have thought of a plan, Maurice," said Kate, presently, in hushed but earnest tones; "a painful one, a cruel one to him who undertakes it, but still a plan."

"Whatever it is, dear Kate, and it lies within my power, you may count upon me."

"O Maurice, dear Maurice, you will not misunderstand me! You remember what

our agreement was, and well must know how further off than ever is the possibility of that old past being renewed; but what a love you must have borne me once to act as you have done! You have played an angel's part, and may He who is above the angels bless you for it! Of no other human being would I dare ask what I am about to ask of you. It is only your goodness which emboldens me to ask you to put on the mask of cruelty. You have suffered so much pain on my account unmurmuring, that I dare propose even to torture you."

"I do not understand you, Kate."

"It is no wonder. When I have explained my meaning, do not hate me, Maurice. You may say 'No'—I think you *will* say 'No'—to what I am about to ask you, but not hate me for having put the question."

"Hate you?" And for the first time since the shadows of shame and ruin fell

upon the sunshine of their lives and quenched it, his voice had the old tender music. "I shall not hate you, Kate."

"I am not sure, Maurice ; for ingratitude is a very hateful thing, and I am going to be ungrateful, cruel, and to pierce the heart which has so freely bled for me.—My plan is this. My mother is discontented with her man of business, Mr. Crozley ; thinks he has been unnecessarily cautious in the investment of her money, and desires to get a better interest for it. She would gladly sell it out (as must indeed have been done in a few weeks), and place it elsewhere. She would even run some hazard to increase our income—for my sake : she says I have not comforts, luxuries enough about me (God help us). She likes you, Maurice, very much ; it is a pleasure to me (though a pain as well) to hear her speak of you ; she has the utmost confidence in your goodwill and judgment. I am sure that I could persuade



her to transfer this money—over which she has sole control—to your keeping, to be invested in any manner that you recommend. It must *go*, you know: it must be given up; it *must* be *lost*. *Will you lose it for us, Maurice Glyn?*”

Maurice, breathing hard, looked at Kate without reply. His hands and feet grew cold: a cold sweat bedewed his brow.

“You hate me,” whispered Kate. “I was afraid of that. Try to forget that I ever asked you to do this thing. Perhaps it is something which would require a hypocrite, a rogue to enact it, as it demanded a heartless, cruel woman to propose it.”

“No, no; not heartless, not cruel, Kate—only despairing. Indeed, I could not do it. Only think what it is you ask. To take an adder in her bosom to warm it, only that it may sting her: that will be your mother’s part: but mine—— Ah, I could not play the adder, Kate.”

"I see, Maurice ; you could not. Only as vile a thing as it could have asked it of you."

"I don't say that, Kate. But the pity of it! To persuade her easy mind ; to win her loving trust ; to lie to her with eye, and lips, and smile ; to turn the very hands against her into which she has poured her store. To beggar her, and to have to tell her so. No, I could never do it."

"You would wrong your nature, Maurice, should you attempt to do it ; forgive me that I ever dreamed you could."

"There *must* be some other way, Kate."

"There is none."

"Well, Kate, we have some weeks before us, yet, to think about this matter, and take counsel together. We have, at all events, something to be thankful for on that score—the removal of immediate peril. We have time to act in, space to breathe in."

"I *am* thankful for it, Maurice, God knows."

"That is well; bear up like a brave girl. I shall see you to-morrow of course, although not very early, for I have some pressing business. And I shall have to return to town to-night, to perform a sad duty on the morrow."

"True friend, true friend," sobbed she; "I can guess what that is."

"You must not give way thus, dear Kate. You may make your mother as wretched by your altered looks, remember, as by the discovery which we fear. Sleep to-night, for although still sorely burdened, your brain has less to bear. Sleep, and be strong to meet what has still to come."

"I will do my very best," returned Kate, humbly, "to restrain this — this selfish fretting. Now you are come—so wise, so kind—half my burden seems already carried for me. Indeed, I will try all I can, Maurice."

"Then, until to-morrow, Kate, good-bye."

They did not shake hands ; they let go of one another's hands, which had been long locked together.

“ Good-bye—good-bye.”

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. GRANGE BECOMES COMMUNICATIVE.

THE night was far advanced when Maurice reached the Vicarage, but he found his host sitting up for him, and the supper-table spread. A kindly welcome beamed from the curate's face, but it was no longer the contented, cheery countenance that his friend was wont to wear; not only disappointment, but a certain quiet scorn, had taken the place of the old good-humoured ease.

"What a truant you have been, Maurice! And not a line have you vouchsafed to write me as to what your highness was about, or when you would condescend to return to Blondel."

"I plead guilty to both counts, Charley,



and throw myself on the mercy of the court. But really, I have been very much engaged."

"Oh, I know *that*," answered the curate, cynically. "The claims of friendship are henceforth secondary, of course, to those of love, if indeed they can be called claims at all. You have been preparing settlements, I suppose, and so on ; well, I hope you have behaved liberally towards your princess."

"Not liberally—no, Milton ; for it is not liberality to bestow our goods upon those we love."

"Bravo ! Mr. Maurice Glyn. The young dog has become sententious ; he is growing aphorisms ; he will be a moral garden. Miss Kate Irby, I drink to you ; you have accomplished a victory that has been denied to the clergy. I have preached to this man myself in full canonicals, and nothing has come of it save ribaldry, but henceforth I foresee a change.—Talking of changes by-



the-by," continued the curate in graver tones, "you have heard—or, perhaps, you have not heard, for why should you care for so small a matter—there will soon be a change at Blondel?"

"What is it, Charley? I like the place so well—thanks to you, my friend—that the very village-gossip is welcome to my ears."

"Well, there's plenty of gossip for you. It has been observed that the young lady at the manor has been exceedingly out of spirits for these three weeks and more; her beautiful eyes, sir, had red rims at church. It is hoped, however, that from to-morrow, under the judicious treatment of a gentleman from town, the symptoms may abate. Also, there has been a man at the ruin, the sole object of whose visit, as some say, has been to take impressions of the brasses at the priory; others whisper that he came to look at the glebe-land, with an eye to purchasing



the advowson of the living. But I weary you."

"You don't weary me, old friend," said Glyn, laying his hand upon the other's shoulder, "but you pain me. If I seem to have behaved inconsiderately, neglectfully, towards you—forgive me. Upon my word and honour, there were valid reasons—although I cannot explain them—for my conduct. I could not write to tell you how I was really engaged without distressing you—the matter is over now, and pray do not ask about it—and I could not write you lies."

"You have been in trouble, then, have you? and that has not spoiled your temper? It does spoil some men's, you know; but you have an excellent disposition. I wish I had."

"Charley, this is not like you."

"I daresay not, Glyn. I am not myself—the man you used to know—at all. It



used to please me when my friends were happy—when any good fortune befel them; but now, ‘Why does this happen to them, and not to me?’ I ask. I am not envious. There is nothing that seems to me worth having, and there is nothing to covet; but their luck offends me—their laugh jars upon my ear. If I was not a clergyman, I should say I feel very much the same as the devil does.”

“Charley, Charley, this is very sad,” said Maurice tenderly. “Look you, I too have had some trials lately, and have some before me still. Never mind what they are, but they are severe ones.”

“You have never known a real trouble in your life, Glyn. You think you have, but you have not. Worries, bothers, social boredoms—things that make up a large sum in the lives of men like me, and which do not slide off us altogether as water from a duck’s back, let me tell you—these you have



escaped almost altogether ; your calling has so enfranchised you that a conventional restraint scarcely ever imposes itself. Yet what annoyance, beyond these, have you ever suffered ? You have no sordid cares, for you are rich."

"I *was*, Charley. I am not now. I am about as poor as you are."

"What ! have you lost your fortune ? Dear Maurice, how sorry I am ! Look here—I have a letter from my uncle—which I did not intend to answer—making overtures (since I have not practically disobeyed him) for a reconciliation. Now, for your sake, if you are in want of money for your marriage ——"

"No, Charley, no," interrupted Maurice. "I should like you to be reconciled to your uncle, but certainly not for my sake. I state the nature of my trouble—that is, of one of them—to convince you that it is a real one : that is all."



“Yes, friend. But, however real, however deep, there is one to sympathise with you, one to comfort you. While I shall have to walk life’s road, alone, for ever. I have seen her, I have shaken hands with her once; but I can’t stand this perpetual tugging at my heart-strings. You see it has hurt my heart already.”

There was a look of self-reproach, a sudden twinge of mental pain, as well as sorrow, in Glyn’s face, as he replied: “Not your heart, old friend: the mischief lies not so deep as that, I hope.”

“I do not know about that, Maurice; but this I know, that life in this place seems well-nigh insupportable; and that makes the news I was about to tell you not unwelcome to me—differently as I should have taken it a few months ago! It will soon be necessary for me to quit Blondel.”

“Quit Blondel? Why?”

“Because my poor old vicar, they say, is



like to die. The advowson, which the late Mr. Irby sold, is in the market. It was partly about that my uncle wrote."

"I know what some people would do, Milton; and I'm not sure they wouldn't be right. They'd let him buy it, and present it to them, and then snap their fingers at him."

"Ay, some people would doubtless; but not people like Maurice Glyn, nor those he chooses for his friends, I hope."

"But why should you go away if the vicar dies?"

"Ah, you don't understand. When the spiritual commander of a parish goes, his aide-de-camp goes with him, and the next incumbent appoints another: 'Have a new master, get a new man,' as the rhyme runs. It's a cruel thing to some men, who have done all the real work of a place for a quarter of a century, perhaps, and though I have had no such long service to endear



Blondel to me—it will be a sore trial to leave it—although, as I have said, I would not stay even if I could. I shall get a cure in some thick-peopled manufacturing town, for my only chance is hard work. When I am working, I have no time to think of Mary, you may suppose ; but that's not it : I fancy she is mine, and that I am going about my business, as a husband should do, while she manages the house. She is left at home, and I am out, you see. It is only when I do get home that the dream is broken, so the longer I stop out the better. It's a poor fancy, Maurice—and one that may seem ludicrous or contemptible to happier men—but it is my only pleasure.”

“ Poor old fellow ! ”

The hearts of the two young men had never been nearer, had never beaten in greater unison than they did that night, as they pressed one another's hands at parting. The curate, thinking of it, became almost of



opinion that life would not be altogether barren for him, since it offered such a friend ; then fell asleep, and dreamed of Mary.

Maurice, less fortunate, felt for some wakeful hours the pangs of conscience ; he had a certain secret upon his mind with respect to the curate, which was growing burdensome to him ; he began to entertain the direst misgivings concerning it ; yet he could not persuade himself to make a clean breast—he loved his friend so well, that he feared to tell him all, lest, perchance, through wrath, he should lose him. And yet, as he reiterated to himself, he deserved no blame, since he had done all for the best, and meaning well. This matter so engrossed his mind, that it even excluded Kate and her troubles ; and when at last he slept, he did not dream of Kate, albeit it seemed, nevertheless, that he was married, and had for father-in-law a blind man, who kept white mice, and much disturbed him during



literary composition by playing on a cracked accordion.

After breakfast, host and guest each went his way, as usual, and neither in the direction of his choice. The curate, promising to be home before Maurice left for town, began his rounds with careful avoidance of the tempting neighbourhood of the priory; Maurice, whose instincts led him to the manor, turned his steps towards the gate-keeper's cottage.

The year was now so far advanced that the curatorship of the ruins had become almost a sinecure; and Grange and his daughter repaired thither later, and came home earlier, accordingly. Neither had left the cottage when Maurice arrived there, or rather the old man was within-doors, and Mary was in the garden, which still looked bright with flowers: thanks to her, summer lingered there, of all spots in Blondel parish, the longest.



It has been observed that Kate Irby looked like a ghost, and wan and white and ghost-like she was, in comparison with the bright being we knew her a few months ago. But Mary, always *spirituelle*, had become almost shadowy: it was not that she was thin, for she had not lost much flesh; but instead of being alabaster-like (except for a touch of rose-pink), she was now transparent like egg-shell china. Mr. Frederic Leighton alone, of living men, can paint such beauties. Concealment, like the worm in the bud, had not indeed preyed upon her damask cheek; for Maurice well knew what had changed her, and his heart smote him as he marked the change. As she stood at the little gate, with a sweet smile of welcome, it seemed that she only needed a palm-branch in her hand, and a wreath upon her forehead, to complete the angelic picture. That smile, to Maurice, spoke not only of welcome but of forgiveness.



“ You have good news, Mr. Glyn, or you would not be here, I know.”

“ Yes, Miss Mary ; or, perhaps, I may say Mary, mayn't I ? I am glad to call the colour to your cheek even for a moment,” added he, tenderly.

“ O Sorrow, why dost borrow
The natural hue of health from vermeil lips ?
To give maiden blushes to the white rose bushes ?
Or is it thy dewy hand the daisy tips ?

I have heard you sing those lines.”

“ Yes, sir. But I don't sing now : there is too much trouble with us. Is the poor gentleman safe, Mr. Glyn ? ”

“ Quite safe, Mary : he is gone to where even the most weary, let us hope, have rest at last. He is dead.”

“ Dead ! God forgive him. God help dear Miss Kate. Does she know, sir ? ”

“ Yes. I saw her last night.”

“ You thought her sadly altered, I'm afraid ? ”

“ Yes ; but I hope, the worst of her trial being over—for I *have* good news to tell—that she may in time regain her roses ; and you too, Mary.”

Her answering smile was sweet as ever, but it was very sad.

“ You will come in and tell my father, sir. He has been very anxious—very.”

“ I don’t doubt it. He has been a faithful friend to his old—to Mr.——”

“ Yes, to his old master, sir,” said Mary, simply ; “ as indeed he was in duty bound to be.—Father, here is Mr. Glyn.”

“ So he is dead,” said the old man, quietly, when Maurice had told him all. “ And they seized his body, did they ? You were quite right not to tell Miss Kate of that. And you were with him to the last, were you ? ”

“ Yes, as I have said. He made mention of you—not then, but during his latest interval of consciousness — with great affection.”

"God bless him ! What did he say of me, sir ?"

"He spoke of your great fidelity."

"Ay. Nothing more?" asked the blind man with eager face.

"No. He spoke in general terms."

"Think, think again, Mr. Glyn. He must have said something else. If he had the trust in you which I am sure he had, if he believed you all your conduct showed you to be, he must have done it."

"No," replied Maurice, wondering at the old man's excitement. "He spoke as I have said; then his mind began to wander, and he muttered something about a summer-house. He was thinking of the place he hid in, in the garden at Anstey Court, I fancy."

"Perhaps so," said the blind man, thoughtfully.—"Mary, dear, is Watson, the carpenter, in the village, as usual? I have not heard of him for months."

"I believe so, father. I saw him only

yesterday, as I passed the shop. He complained of cold in his joints."

"Yes; he is getting old, like some others of us.—By the by, you have heard that our vicar is like to die, Mr. Glyn? However, he has been dead these four years, at least so far as knowing what he was about: he might have been a stick or a stone. Yet, he had his tithes paid regular; while poor Mr. Milton, who did all the work, got but scanty wages. Is there any chance, think you, of his having the living given to him?"

"About as much chance as of its being given to me," said Glyn. "The advowson is now for sale."

"Mary, my darling, give me my stick," observed the blind man, suddenly. "I am going out for a walk with Mr. Glyn—that is, if he is not ashamed of my company."

"Certainly not," returned Maurice, not, however, without embarrassment, for it seemed to him that the gate-keeper had taken leave

of his senses, while Mary's looks were by no means reassuring upon that score ; they reflected the wonder, if not the apprehension, of his own. "Certainly not," stammered he ; "but the fact is, I have got an appointment at the manor-house."

"That is the very place I am going to," responded the blind man, cheerfully. "So, with your good leave, you and I will go together."

And accordingly off they started, leaving Mary quite overcome with the wine of astonishment.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RIFT IN THE WRACK.

It was late in the afternoon when Maurice presented himself in the drawing-room of the manor-house ; but there must have been light enough left to afford the ladies a good view of him, to judge from Madam's greeting.

"What a bright face you have, my dear Mr. Glyn ! It does one more good than all in a doctor's shop to look at it ; and I hope it will do my darling here good also.—Is he not brilliant, Katie ? Has he not furbished himself up since last night ?"

"Yes, indeed, he looks much better, mamma."

"I wish *you* did, my precious !" said Madam.

"Really, ladies," returned Maurice, with

a gallant bow, "I don't know which way to look : it is no wonder that I have a colour. As for the improvement in my appearance, that is the miraculous effect of Blondel air. But I must say, Mrs. Irby, that I think Kate looks better also, much better than she did twelve hours ago."

"You had a better night," said Madam, caressing her ; "had you not, darling ? Not that this gentleman has hurried himself to inquire about you, notwithstanding that he was in the manor grounds this very morning."

"In the manor grounds !" said Kate, with astonishment.

"O yes, my dear, he was there, or at least in what used to be the grounds—the wall-garden. I was in my housekeeper's room, and saw him, though he hid himself so cunningly in the summer-house. Of course, it is not my business ; but if he was *my* young man, instead of yours——"



"My dear Mrs. Irby, if we had only met earlier!" sighed Maurice, comically.

"Go along with you," said Madam, scornfully; "I am very angry with such neglect. And, Katie dear, he had a companion about whom you should require an explanation also. It was blind Joseph Grange, of all the people in the world; and it's my belief that Mr. Glyn is thinking of becoming his son-in-law, and throwing you over altogether. I determined not to tell you till he was here to defend himself; but just see how confused and abashed he looks: I'm sadly afraid he's guilty."

"I confess circumstances have conspired against me," said Maurice, speciously, and with the air of a gentleman about to be committed for trial; "but when the proper time arrives, I shall have a complete and satisfactory explanation to offer. In the meantime, I reserve my defence."

"What *could* he and that old man have



been in the wall-garden for?" mused Mrs. Irby. "They were after no good, I'll warrant—probably the peaches."

"My dear Madam, I will satisfy your curiosity so far. Joseph had heard there were alterations to be effected—the old summer-house pulled down, and what not, and he expressed a wish to see the old place (that's what he *said*, poor fellow) before it was changed."

"And you offered to be his convoy, did you? That was very kind of you. Now, upon your honour, was not that done for Mary's sake?—He hesitates, he stammers.—Kate, if you have an atom of proper pride, exhibit it now, and take this gentleman to task."

"Mr. Glyn always did flirt with Mary," said Kate, with a faint smile.

"That's right, Katie; call him Mr. Glyn, instead of Maurice. I like that."

Here, to poor chatty Madam's surprise and terror, Kate burst into tears.



"My precious love, my only darling, what *is* the matter?" cried the old lady, hurrying to her daughter's side.

"Nothing, mamma, nothing. I am better now. It was very foolish of me, but somehow I feel so weak."

Maurice threw up the window, and the cool air at once revived the poor girl; but as for Madam, this catastrophe seemed to have quenched every spark of her new-born cheerfulness. Her conversation now wholly ran upon her misfortunes, her wrongs, her poverty.

"All the village knows about it," murmured she, speaking of this last. "Even blind old Joseph Grange, you see, had heard of the alterations that that man who rents the garden is making. He says the summer-house is of no use to him—where dear Katie used to learn her lessons when she was a girl; but what does he care about that? He can pull down anything he likes."



I believe the carpenter has already had his orders. Was Watson there, Mr. Glyn?"

"No, Madam; but I happened to see him at his own house; and I think I may promise you—the market-gardener, it seems, has altered his mind—that the summer-house will not be pulled down."

"I am glad to hear that," said Madam. "Not, however," added she querulously, "that it signifies much; for there is no pleasure in looking at the place, now it isn't our own; though it might be, I do believe, if Mr. Crozley would manage our affairs a little better. He does not get five per cent. for my money, Mr. Glyn—not five per cent!"

"That is not a very profitable return, indeed," said Maurice, thoughtfully.

Kate's heart began to throb tumultuously; she could not trust herself to look at the speakers, but hid her face in her hands. •



"No, indeed," urged Madam. "I consider it very hard that we should have to stint so, when we might realise quite a large income if we were not so timorous."

"There is almost always risk, however, with a large percentage," observed Maurice, gravely.

"Well, a little risk, perhaps; but I am sure I should like to run it, and not to have to cut and contrive so, as I have now. Do *you* happen to know, Mr. Glyn where I could put out my money so as to get a better interest for it?"

"Certainly, Madam. I could get eight, ten, perhaps twelve per cent. for it; but then it would not be so safe as where it lies at present."

"Well, my dear Mr. Glyn, if it wasn't asking too much trouble, I really wish you would take it—the whole five thousand pounds—and place it where we should get a little more benefit from it—say eight per



cent. That would be safe enough, would it not?"

"I won't guarantee it, my dear Madam."

"No, of course not; you can only do your best. But I am sure you would never deceive me, Mr. Glyn, but treat it exactly as you would your own."

"Yes; supposing you are in earnest, I should invest it in the very same way as I have done my own. I have placed that in an insurance company, which pays its shareholders even more than eight per cent."

Kate shuddered. It was she who had compelled this man thus to deceive and lie.

"Well now, really, Mr. Glyn," pursued her mother, "I do hope you are in earnest. I am not at all pleased with Mr. Crozley—though I don't say he's not a good man in his way—and I shall not be at all sorry to become disconnected with him. And the sooner it's done the better. He and I have

never been of one mind in business matters, as I am sure you and I should be ; and then you being such a friend, and about to be so near a relative—that will do away with all formality between us. When once I have got the money, I shall give it to you, without any lawyering and fuss ; and that will save time, and time is money. I am woman of business enough myself to know *that*.”

It was very sad and pitiful to hear the poor lady thus vaunting her knowledge of affairs, while running into the snare that it was not even necessary to bait for her. She quite recovered her former cheerfulness, after having effected this excellent stroke of business, or, to use her own graphic words, felt “as pleased as Punch.” It was arranged that she should write to Mr. Crozley, to inform him of the resolution she had taken, that very evening.”

“I will go and do it at once,” said she, “and get it off my mind. I daresay you



young folks can dispense with my presence, and it is but fair that my legal adviser here, whose opinion I have thus got gratis, should have his reward."

"O Maurice," cried Kate, in agonised tones, as soon as her mother had closed the door, "how *could* you play the hypocrite like that! It is all my fault, I know—I made you do it—but my heart bled for dear mamma, and somehow, Maurice, I almost shrink from you. You acted to the life indeed—only too well."

"Extorted praise, Kate, is, it is said, the highest meed, and therefore I must thank you for your compliment; but as for the blame which encloses it, as the bread wraps the meat in a beef sandwich, I don't see how I have deserved that. Last night you pressed upon me a certain course of action, so painful that at first I refused to embrace it; but after a night's reflection—and a day's to boot—I come into your plan, and execute

it with complete success. My reward is your censure, not to say disgust."

"But, Maurice, you are so changed in look and manner since last night; your forced gaiety—although, indeed, I have no wish to see you sad—jars upon me even more than poor mamma's false hopes."

"Does it, Kate? But suppose the gaiety is *not* forced—is genuine, real? Suppose something has happened since I saw you last to make me gay?"

"I hope there has, dear Mr. Glyn," rejoined Kate fervently. "There is no one's happiness in which I should rejoice so much as yours."

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I am no judge at all. Now, it is not vanity, dear Mr. Glyn —— ”

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“ It is not vanity, Maurice, Heaven knows, but a much more material sort of feeling, which bids me ask you to look over some of these things, and to tell me whether they are saleable—whether they are worth a few shillings ; and if so, perhaps I shall write better after a time, and thereby help to keep the house. I have them in the boudoir : may I fetch them ? ”

“ Yes ; fetch them by all means.—Poor Kate ! ” soliloquised Maurice, as she ran upstairs, “ to place her hopes in Grub Street. And translations, too, of all the drugs that cumber the literary market ! However, if the worst comes to the worst this has happened well. I will take care that her wares fetch a good price, and she shall never know but that it is the publisher who gives it.”

She came back with a white deprecating face and a little parcel in her hand.

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"Trust, Maurice! I have the most child-like confidence in all you say. But if at

deepest midnight you should say : ' Look, child, the sun will suddenly burst forth,' even a child will not believe you."

" Ah, that's what comes of your German studies, Kate—rank scepticism," answered Maurice smiling. " When I see you next, I hope it will be to put you in better spirits."

" You heard what mamma said," replied Kate, taking his outstretched hand : " your coming always does us ailing folk more good than the doctor's."

" Very good, and very pretty. But mind, Kate, that, like the doctor, when I give you my advice (and perhaps I shall have to prescribe for you ere long), I shall expect you to take it."

" We will take whatever you recommend, for I am sure it will be good for us," replied Kate, simply.

It is my belief that Dr. Maurice Glyn, emboldened by finding himself thus established in his patient's good opinion, was, at



this moment, within a very little—indeed, only an inch or two—of administering *oscula communia*, which would certainly have given a shock to her system, and perhaps destroyed all confidence in him as her professional adviser. Fortunately, however, he restrained himself, and took his leave in the Platonic style, as usual.

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"We," and, when irritated, was accustomed to designate him (with his finger upon his double-leaded remarks) as "This fellow."

"Why, Milton, this is quite a reformation, to see you at the feet of that Gamaliel! I hope you are learning to reconsider your views upon the question of church-rates. That was a very good leader, it struck me."

"I am doing nothing of the kind," growled the curate; "and it struck me as rubbish. I am looking into the only part of a newspaper that is always well worth reading."

"The preferments and appointments, eh?" returned Maurice, silyly.

"No, sir; the advertisements. I have found a curacy, which I think will suit me, if I only possess the requisite qualifications. I am rather doubtful about being able to intone."

"Catch a bumble-bee, and put him between two window-panes," said Maurice, didactically; "then listen with attention."

“It is a district church in a manufacturing town, and there are ten thousand souls to be cared for. I want work; and besides, I must go somewhere for the most material reasons—bread and cheese, for instance.”

“Just so,” said Maurice: “no cure, no pay. But don’t you be in a hurry about that advertisement, Milton.”

“Why not? I should not like to lose the chance it seems to offer. It would just suit me, I believe; and I thought of answering the advertisement at once.”

“Well, as a particular favour, my dear fellow, do not do so till I return from town. I have a very especial reason for that request.”

The curate looked up, astonished.

“The fact is,” continued Maurice (“although the matter is not quite certain, else you should know it), I have something in my eye for you myself.”



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"Maurice, please."

"Sad rubbish, Maurice; but if so, I must take to my needle. I can do plain work tolerably well."

"Do you understand the sewing-machine?" inquired Maurice, with the air of an employer of female labour engaging "a hand."

"Well, I am afraid I don't," returned Kate, ruefully; "but then that does not matter, for I could not afford to buy one."

"Just so," said Maurice, the corners of his mouth twitching spasmodically, but otherwise with a face of the greatest gravity. "Poor girl!—Well," continued he after a pause, during which he managed to cram the parcel of manuscript into his pocket, "I must be off to-night, Kate, and can scarcely return very soon. I have much work

tell you what a boon your presence is just now. It is only within these last few weeks that I have known true loneliness ; and although you don't give me much of your company in the day, when you are beneath my roof I feel myself less forlorn. When I get away from here, perhaps it will be different."

"Poor old fellow!" said Maurice. The words were simple, but the feeling deep, and the curate knew it; he held out his hand with averted face. "I have endeavoured to give him a crumb of comfort," soliloquised Glyn, mournfully, "and see, it has almost choked him! Here am I absolutely bursting with good news, which, because it has not been quite confirmed, I dare not communicate to those whom it most affects. It would be terrible if I sent the funds up by intelligence which was, after all, a *canard*, and I have already perhaps said too much, in case it is so. I was not born for secrets—stratagems.

deepest midnight you should say : ' Look, child, the sun will suddenly burst forth,' even a child will not believe you."

" Ah, that's what comes of your German studies, Kate—rank scepticism," answered Maurice smiling. " When I see you next, I hope it will be to put you in better spirits."

" You heard what mamma said," replied Kate, taking his outstretched hand : " your coming always does us ailing folk more good than the doctor's."

" Very good, and very pretty. But mind, Kate, that, like the doctor, when I give you my advice (and perhaps I shall have to prescribe for you ere long), I shall expect you to take it."

" We will take whatever you recommend, for I am sure it will be good for us," replied Kate, simply.

It is my belief that Dr. Maurice Glyn, emboldened by finding himself thus established in his patient's good opinion, was, at



this moment, within a very little—indeed, only an inch or two—of administering *oscula communia*, which would certainly have given a shock to her system, and perhaps destroyed all confidence in him as her professional adviser. Fortunately, however, he restrained himself, and took his leave in the Platonic style, as usual.

CHAPTER XV.

MORE CRUMBS OF COMFORT.

ON his return to the vicarage, Maurice found the curate with a newspaper before him, which was a very unusual circumstance. Milton was one of those who, while earnestly doing their duty in their own sphere of action, care but little how the great world spins round them: at all events, he had not that confidence in the writer of a leading article, which is such a charming feature in the character of lay country-folks; I say "lay," because I am afraid the clergy rather mistrust the press, and consider its teaching a little too much like preaching—an infringement upon their particular prerogative. At all events, the Rev. Charles Milton had very little reverential feeling for the omniscient

"I hope we aint agoing through all this for nothin'," ejaculated he, with a groan, but not querulously either. Although the business on which he was bent was not his own, the honest carpenter had his heart in it.

"I hope so, indeed, Mr. Watson. We are playing for a great stake, but you have deserved well whether we win or lose. We may say with the great admiral, 'A peerage or Westminster Abbey.'"

Mr. Watson, in addition to having his head swathed in flannels, was a little deaf, and totally unacquainted with the biography of Nelson.

"You may stay where you like, sir, of course; but none of your *Great Admirals* for me. I puts up at the *Runnin' 'Orse* in Oburn, which I've done for forty year and more, and don't mean to change. Moreover, though I'm quite at your service in the business-way, as for going to Westminster Abbey for pleasure, what with them cold

monuments and the draughts it have (let alone their charges, which is disgraceful), you don't catch me there with my rheumatics, if I knows it."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRUTH, BUT NOT THE WHOLE TRUTH.

It was a strange freak for Fortune to play Maurice Glyn, who, as the curate truly said, had never experienced any real bother (and scarcely even its diminutive, botheration) in all his life, but he was now overwhelmed with cares, and had business enough on his hands to satisfy a firm of attorneys.

In the first place, he had to perform the part of chief and only mourner at the funeral of Robert Irby; a natural and Christian act, as it may seem, and indeed was—but still there are some folks (especially Scotch and Irish) who like funerals, and others who loathe them; and Maurice was of the latter class. There may not be many of us who actually rejoice, as the cynical philosopher

insists, in the misfortunes of our friends, but there are a great number of folks to whom ghastliness of all sorts is a show and a treat; and among whom physical sufferings, sickness, and death, are without doubt, favourite topics of conversation. There is something of the ghoul in almost all vulgar and unimaginative natures; while, on the other hand, there are sensitive organisations (by no means intellectually weak ones) which shrink with morbid horror from all such things, almost from all such talk. If help be needed, where a tunnel has fallen in, and men are digging with frenzied haste for fellow-creatures that are buried alive, they will be there and dig also; if their tending can soothe the sick, they will be found by his bedside; if duty demands their standing by the grave-mouth, they will not shirk it; but they will avoid all such scenes, if there is no such call upon them, with the most studious care. They are grievous and

painful to them, to an extent undreamed of by more hardy natures, and especially by the ghouls, although these often take credit to themselves for a self-sacrifice, which is in truth almost a pleasure. Therefore, although it may seem a little thing to many (nothing, for instance, in comparison with the self-denial involved in his parting with his Aunt Rachel's five thousand pounds—to him a much less disagreeable affair), that was to Maurice a most dismal day when he sat solitary in the mourning-coach that followed poor Irby's remains to Kensal Green. The nodding plumes (for he let the undertaker work his hideous will), the scarves, the simulated gravity of the red-nose professionals (all so charming to Mrs. Gresham, and doing such credit to everybody's feelings, as well as to her little establishment, in the eyes of the neighbours), were to him repulsive, grim, abhorrent. Upon the whole, that little "cruise upon wheels," to the



cemetery and back—quite a pleasure-trip to some of us, and really nothing to anybody of reasonable common sense—to our poor unheroic Maurice (who dealt in his books, too, with such matters in a particularly picturesque and graphic style), the most disagreeable and oppressive business of all that he had to do; and, as we have said, he had a great deal to do.

Long days and weeks of work—and that worst kind of work which no diligence nor toil of our own can hasten—lay before him. The insurance companies had to satisfy themselves by sufficient investigation, although conducted with caution and privacy, that the widow's estate had shrunk to the dimensions represented to them. Then Madam's five thousand pounds was not realised in twenty-four hours—nor, to do him justice, without the strongest remonstrance on the part of her late adviser, Mr. Crozley, transferred to Maurice's control. Then his own money,

with hers, had to be made over to the companies, in exchange for a deed of quittance. If there be any who fancy that all these things were done within reasonable time, they must be fortunate folks, for they can have had little to do with law or lawyers. And yet, strange to say, none of these important matters were the chief cause of Mr. Maurice Glyn's being in town, or occupied the largest share of his attention. Certainly, none of them—not the Kensal Green expedition (although some may consider that was not altogether without cause for congratulation), nor his getting hold of Madam's money (which would have pleased others), nor that unselfish parting with his own, gave him the pleasure which he derived from this at present unrevealed source. No doubt the reader shared the surprise of Miss Kate and the curate at Mr. Glyn's good spirits when he last left Blondel Parva upon an apparently lugubrious errand; and especially he

desires to have it explained why Maurice took the village carpenter for his companion on the journey. The mean, or the volatile, may have imagined that it was to cheapen the expenses of the aforesaid interment, but we have already, by our description of the same, swept away that base (and baseless) hypothesis.

To explain this matter—the most important of all we have yet had to deal with—it will be necessary to go back to the morning at the gate-keeper's cottage when Joseph Grange proposed to take that “constitutional” in company with Mr. Maurice Glyn, and took it.

“Sir,” said the blind man, as soon as they were fairly on their way, “I daresay you think it strange that I should have thus inflicted my company upon you; but I have a very pressing reason for it. I could have told you what I have to tell, have shown you what I hope to show you to-day, as

easily a month ago as now ; but I had no authority to do so until you brought it with you, and gave it me not ten minutes since."

"*I* gave you authority ? What about ? You are dreaming !" And Maurice regarded his sightless and unaccustomed companion with something like alarm. To confess the truth, this exordium confirmed his suspicions respecting the gate-keeper's aberration of mind, and he did not enjoy the situation at all.

"Yes," resumed the blind man, quietly ; "when you mentioned the word 'summer-house,' then I knew that it was my dead master's wish that you should know his secret. It was the sign agreed upon between us when I parted from him last."

"But if he was sane—which, indeed, I did not give him credit for—when he spoke that word," urged Maurice, "why did he not tell *me* this secret, if, indeed, there be

such? Why should I have it from you at second-hand?"

Over the blind man's face there stole a very curious look; his eyelids twinkled; his lips formed a crooked smile; the stick with which he incessantly tapped the ground struck quicker and quicker, as was his custom when much excited.

"Well, perhaps he was too weak, Mr. Glyn; maybe, he had no breath to spare."

"He was certainly very weak," mused Maurice, "at that time; but he had many other previous opportunities."

"Yes; but it was only towards the very last—when he felt fully convinced, sir, by your care and kindness of him, that you were of the right sort, and would be careful and kind towards Miss Kate also—that you were, in short, a fit husband for his darling—that he wished to repose this confidence in you. 'Joseph,' said he to me, 'if I find this gentleman is worthy of my Kate, I will

tell him my secret ; but if not, do you wait until she marries a better man, and then tell *him*. In case there should be people in the room' (he meant the police, sir), 'or anything to prevent my speaking out to Mr. Glyn, I shall just tell him to visit you, and ask about the "summer-house;" then you will know what to do.' And that was why I was so anxious, sir, to hear the very words my old master used concerning me. I was thankful to hear them, sir ; I am glad to think," exclaimed the blind man, vehemently, "that the time has come at last when the wicked and the prosperous shall be stricken. Richard Anstey, you would have carried off my only child, and left me forlorn and desolate ; but the hour is at hand when, blind though I be, I shall see your downfall ! He persecuted her, sir—I knew it, although she never told me—he sought her ruin, Mr. Glyn, my innocent child's, the only prop and stay of her blind

father; and now, thank Heaven, God is about to visit him for these things!"

The storm and passion in the sightless face were terrible to witness: he looked, in his venerable ire, like the bard of old who anathematised the "ruthless king."

"He has a heart of stone," continued the old man, "but poverty shall wear it away like the dripping of water; he has tasted of wealth, and penury will be doubly bitter to him; he was merciless to even his own flesh and blood, and why should *we* show him mercy?"

"It never entered into my mind to show him any, Mr. Grange," replied Maurice, grimly. "Don't distress yourself on *that* account; but if you could show me the way even to get justice on him, it would be a step in the right direction, and more to the purpose than invective."

"We will have justice, Mr. Glyn, ay, and more than justice; that I promise you. By

fraud has he wronged the fatherless, and—and—yes, sir, we will exact punishment to the uttermost.—No, Mr. Glyn, not through the great gates”—for they had by this time reached the chief entrance of the manor, and the blind man’s quick ear had recognised it as his companion’s sleeve brushed the bars in passing—“we must go the back-way into the wall-garden; it is there where the old summer-house stands.”

There were some men at garden-work in the employment of Madam’s new tenant, but they took no notice of Maurice and his companion, both of whom they knew by sight, so that the visitors met with no obstruction. They knew not that Madam (as has been seen) was watching them from the house-keeper’s room, and she, on her part, little guessed on what errand they came—momentous to herself perhaps above everybody.

The summer-house, once the bower dedicated to Kate’s youthful studies, was in a

most dilapidated state, although the immediate propinquity of the well-warmed greenhouse into which it opened had tolerably preserved it from damp and mildew. The once gay paper hung in faded strips from the wall; the rickety table stood with its drawer half shut (for the wood had warped, and it would neither close nor open), like a dog with its tongue out; the cane-bottoms of the chairs had given way, certainly not from the weight of recent occupants; and the one-armed chair had burst (from sheer *ennui*), and showed its horse-hair stuffing.

"There is a square place over the inner door, is there not?" said the blind man.

"Yes; it looks like a closed ventilator."

"It is not that," replied the other. "Open it. You will find a ladder in the green-house—the one they use for the grapes."

Maurice did as he was bid, climbed up to the place pointed out to him, and, not with-

out much difficulty, and at the sacrifice of the blade of his penknife, picked out the square piece of wood. In the hollow thus revealed lay a little box.

"There is a box here. Is that what you are in search of, Mr. Grange?"

"Ay." The old man's voice trembled excessively. "Is it heavy?"

"It has something inside it, but not money certainly;" for the face of the blind man wore a look unmistakably avaricious. Though without eyes, Joseph Grange's countenance was very eloquent; it had its good expressions, which were habitual to it, but it had occasionally its bad ones, and those were chiefly cunning and greed.

"If it is not money, it is money's worth. A parchment, is it not?"

"Yes, a parchment; it looks like a will."

"Hush! Put it in your breast-pocket," answered the old man hurriedly, and with much agitation; "button it close. I will

tell you what you have there as we go home. Take me home at once ; I am not well. What a risk it was in my poor master to trust to one old man's life ! If I had died—but there, my very ghost would have come back to tell you of what lay yonder ;—Are we out o' gates ? For my brain goes round, and I have lost my reckoning. Are we quite alone now ? ”

“ Yes, quite alone, and on the open road.”

“ Good.—Did you ever hear how that Sir Nicholas Anstey—uncle to this Richard—once made a will whereby he bequeathed everything—except the great provision he made for his natural children—to his god-daughter, Miss Kate Irby, save five hundred pounds to his nephew ? ”

“ I have heard that, but it was also said that, upon a quarrel with the late Mr. Robert Irby, he tore up the will in pieces before his face.”

easily a month ago as now; but I had no authority to do so until you brought it with you, and gave it me not ten minutes since."

"*I* gave you authority? What about? You are dreaming!" And Maurice regarded his sightless and unaccustomed companion with something like alarm. To confess the truth, this exordium confirmed his suspicions respecting the gate-keeper's aberration of mind, and he did not enjoy the situation at all.

"Yes," resumed the blind man, quietly; "when you mentioned the word 'summer-house,' then I knew that it was my dead master's wish that you should know his secret. It was the sign agreed upon between us when I parted from him last."

"But if he was sane—which, indeed, I did not give him credit for—when he spoke that word," urged Maurice, "why did he not tell *me* this secret, if, indeed, there be

that he, at least, had satisfied himself with his own eyes that the previous will was really destroyed."

"The most cunning folk overreach themselves sometimes," observed the blind man coolly; but again there stole over his face that curious look which Maurice noticed upon it when he had asked why Irby had not communicated the secret to him at first hand: his eyelids twinkled, and although he strove to keep an unmoved face, his stick struck quicker on the ground its ceaseless tattoo.

"Do you know who are the witnesses to this will, Mr. Grange?"

"Yes, I do: the present vicar, who, however, has lost his wits; and William Watson, the carpenter. It was the last time Sir Nicholas was at the manor, when in high good humour with the squire, and delighted with Miss Katie, he made this will. The vicar was dining there that day, and Watson

was doing some odd job about the house, and that was how they two came to sign their names to it. When it was done, Sir Nicholas gave the document, in their presence, over to the squire's keeping, as if to show that he had no intention of ever changing his mind, which, nevertheless, as we well know, he did. And the squire, as you have seen, placed it in the summer-house, out of harm's way. That is the whole story."

"It will need proof," mused Maurice. "When I have read the will, I will see Watson, and take him up to town with me to-night if possible ; when the affair shall be placed at once in proper hands. In the meantime, Mr. Grange, I know I can trust implicitly to your secrecy. We must run down this villain without giving tongue."

"And you will show him no mercy, sir—remember that."

"He shall have justice," returned Maurice;

“the worst of men have a right to that—but no more. And now, for the present, I must leave you; for I am impatient to look into this, and I know you can find your way home alone; that is, if you feel quite recovered.”

“Aye; better than I ever felt in my life. The cordial was very strong, and took my breath away, just at first; but now it is well down, I am as a giant refreshed.—Yes,” chuckled the blind man, after they parted, and when he had assured himself that Maurice was out of hearing; “I will be secret, never fear. The squire was wise indeed to trust the matter to me—‘Justice,’ forsooth, and ‘Right’ are words that with Richard Anstey have no meaning. Who gives fresh milk to a wolf?—No, Mr. Glyn; you are too mealy-mouthed to be trusted with all I know. If you guessed that the squire, in anticipation of that very change in Sir Nicholas which did take place, had had

a copy of this very will made, and gave it up at his cousin's angry demand, to be destroyed ('torn to pieces before his face'—yes, that was it), *instead of the original*, perhaps you would have scruples—qualms. What! scruples in taking what the law awards from one who breaks the law, who neglects the wishes of the dead, and burns their wills! Scruples—qualms, in favour of the wretch who would have compassed my Mary's ruin! No, no, Mr. Glyn; as you say, I can be trusted to be secret: you have heard all you shall ever hear from me."

CHAPTER XVII.

QUITS WITH SIR RICHARD.

So soon as counsel's opinion had been taken upon the will which Maurice Glyn had so singularly become possessed of, he determined to seek a personal interview with Sir Richard Anstey. There was scarcely a doubt but that Kate Irby could dispossess him of all he had, and even exact restitution of what he had spent, since he had come into his late uncle's estate; but this could only be done by trial in open court, where all the circumstances connected with Robert Irby's fraud would certainly be disclosed. It was necessary, therefore, to effect some sort of compromise. Maurice well knew that Kate would make no claim at the risk of exposure; but he built his hope of getting good terms



upon the fact, that the letter which he had written to Sir Richard, after Irby's death, had borne good fruit; that the hint therein conveyed of his knowledge of the destruction of the will had stopped all further persecution on the baronet's part, and probably sealed his lips for ever.

On a certain morning Maurice presented himself at Sir Richard's door in Eaton Place, and without even being asked his name, was at once admitted. He had expected some difficulty here; that if his card was taken in, the baronet would probably refuse to see him, and he was agreeably surprised to find this obstacle surmounted; but the fact was, Sir Richard, whose taste had always lain that way, had, now that he could afford it, become deeply connected with the turf; he not only betted heavily, but himself ran horses, and he was in the habit of receiving persons of all descriptions, "with the latest intelligence," and his servant was therefore

not so inquisitorial, as is usual in Eaton Place, with respect to visitors' names. "A gentleman to see you, Sir Richard," was all he said, as he ushered Maurice into his master's reception-room, and then closed the door discreetly, without the slightest idea that he had introduced a game-cock with spurs to a game-cock without them.

"What do you want? Why do you come here?" asked Sir Richard, starting angrily from his chair as soon as he recognised his visitor: the look of Maurice Glyn always robbed him of his habitual self-control—tore away the sheepskin, as it were, from his wolf's hide.

"Have patience, and you shall hear, sir," returned Maurice.

"I do not wish to hear—I will have nothing to do with you;" and he laid his hand upon the bell. If he had rung it, and turned his visitor out, the latter (hampered by Kate's fears) would have been puzzled



how to act ; but he did not ring it ; he stood irresolute—even apprehensive, as Maurice thought.

“Just as you please, Sir Richard ; but if you will not listen—if you compel me to tell my tale to others, it will be the worse for you—your ruin be on your own head.”

“Ruin, pshaw ! what big words are these ? You think I was frightened by your letter, I suppose, with its absurd accusation ; whereas, since this Irby was dead, I simply abstained from making a public scandal upon his daughter’s account. But I am not going to be bullied. You are a lawyer, and should know that even the writing of a threatening letter—quite apart from the truth of its assertions—is a most serious offence.”

“When you are quite calm, I will tell you what I am come about.”

Sir Richard sat down, and folding his hands upon his knee, regarded his visitor

with a contemptuous smile ; but the foot that was upon the carpet shifted uneasily.

“ You are aware, I suppose, that your uncle, Sir Nicholas, once made a will, by which he bequeathed more than half his great estate to his godchild, Kate Irby, and but five hundred pounds to yourself? ”

“ Well.”

“ Afterwards, however, he made another, reversing this disposition of his property, and leaving you his heir, and Miss Irby only a legatee. Now, one of these wills has been destroyed.”

“ Both ! ” ejaculated Sir Richard, vehemently—“ that is,” added he, correcting himself, “ I suppose they have, since the second has never been found.”

“ That would have been a dangerous admission of yours, Sir Richard, had a witness been present,” observed Maurice, drily ; “ as it is, however, we can talk together without reserve. I know perfectly well what came



of the second will. You burned it, in the Blue Parlour of Anstey Court, while your uncle lay dead on the bed. Robert Irby saw you do it."

"He was a liar," returned Richard, in a hoarse, low voice, and looking suspiciously towards the door, "and a felon!"

"Yes; and what is still more to the purpose, he is dead," said Maurice, coolly. "However, both you and Irby are agreed in this, that the second will is not in existence. Now the first *is*, and I've got it."

"You lie!" cried Sir Richard, savagely. "If you have any such thing, you forged it. The first will was torn to pieces by my uncle before Irby's face."

"Did you see it done? Did anybody—even a felon—see it done? There is nobody who can be more aware of the value of personal testimony than yourself, Sir Richard. Have you any such to prove this?"

"I am perfectly sure—I will take my

Bible oath," cried the baronet, excitedly, "that that will was destroyed as I have stated."

"Just so—that is, to the best of your belief. I believe you are perfectly honest for once in that avowal. But what rather damages its truth is, that my lawyer has this very identical will in his possession at this moment; and one of the witnesses to it has sworn to his own handwriting. I have got an attested copy of the document in my pocket, and of course you can peruse the original, which, however, I thought it more prudent not to bring with me. Some people have a habit of burning wills."

"If what you say be true," observed Richard, without noticing this last remark, which, perhaps, he did not hear (for, while perusing the parchment, he had suddenly grown very pale and thoughtful), "this felon Irby, in addition to his other crimes, must have given up some duplicate of this will

into my uncle's hands, and fraudulently kept back the original for his own purposes."

"Between ourselves, Sir Richard, and in the absence of witnesses," observed Maurice, coolly, "I don't mind telling you that that is also my opinion."

"I am quite sure that my cousin Kate would never take advantage of a fraud," said Richard, drawing a long breath.

"He is certainly *the* greatest scoundrel I ever met in my life," ejaculated Maurice. "There is nobody comes near him for villainess.—Look here, you dog!" exclaimed he, suddenly; "the case stands thus. This scheme of Irby's would have availed nothing, but for your own crime. Do you prate of fraud, who burn dead men's wills before their limbs are cold! You have overreached yourself—disinherited yourself—have only yourself (and your foul greed) to thank for total ruin. Whatever you may henceforth possess will be doled out to you

—and by me, by *me*, you scoundrel—in the way of charity, not right. You owe already more than you can pay. The five hundred pounds, which alone is justly yours, has already five times over been paid out of the estate: you spent as much in chartering that steamer at Liverpool, you vengeful hound. As for Kate Irby (whose name your lips pollute whenever you frame it), she shall never know, be sure, what you and I suspect about this will. She would not believe it, if you told her; no human being would believe it on your evidence, and she least of all. You are hoist with your own petard every way. Do you see—you fool and rogue in one—that we have you in a vice? If I had my way, Richard Anstey, I would turn the screw, and squeeze you finely: you might squeal your loudest.”

“All England shall ring with her father’s shame,” exclaimed Richard through his set teeth.



“That will be your revenge, of course; we expected as much. It is to prevent that—though contrary to my advice (*I* would give you nothing)—that it is proposed to throw you a bone with a little flesh upon it. You will be forgiven the mesne profits, every shilling of which could be recovered from you; and your cousin will allow you a thousand pounds a year out of the estate. Come; I told you down at Liverpool that when the hour of retribution came, I would not be merciless, in consideration of your being so perfect a model of rascality. During this interview, you have even exceeded my expectations in that way; and I will use my influence with your cousin to make your allowance guineas instead of pounds. Do you accept these conditions or not?”

“What choice have I?” snarled Sir Richard, like a dog that has a mind to fly at his master’s throat, yet dares not.

“You can go to law, and publish your cousin’s shame. You will lose your case, and thenceforward be a beggar; but you will have your revenge. You have to consider whether that is worth such a price. You are like one of those venomous things which can only sting once, and then are dead. Will you throw yourself upon your cousin’s mercy—through me? You are neither to write to her, nor speak with her, mind that. Will you do this or not? come; decide.”

“When I have satisfied myself of the existence of this will, I will do it.”

“You are wise, Richard Anstey. On this card is my lawyer’s address.”

“Does he know?” inquired the baronet, darkly.

“Of your crime? No. It is not everybody who desires to shame their own flesh and blood. He only knows that Kate Irby is your uncle’s heiress. You have but to

tell him that since this will has been discovered, you gladly accept the terms that have been offered you by me, her agent. They are lenient ones," added Maurice, as he rose and took up his hat, "far better than you deserve ; and you know it."

A ghastly smile flitted over Sir Richard's face.

"I understand," said he.

Maurice nodded curtly, and left the baronet to his meditations.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADAM KISSES HIM.

WINTER trod close that year upon the heels of autumn, and by the time Maurice Glyn had settled his various affairs in town, the first snow had fallen. The train that carried him down to Blondel Parva sped through a white world. But the snow-clouds having emptied their contents, the atmosphere was green and clear, the keen air inspiriting, the sunshine bright and glorious. Old Mr. Watson, whom Maurice had easily retained in town by a promise to pay all charges at the *Runnin' Orse*, with two guineas a day for loss of time (for Maurice was jealous above all things that the good news should be brought to Blondel by none but himself),

did indeed complain of the cold ; but to his companion nothing seemed amiss. Who that has borne happy tidings to his beloved ones, has not experienced this ? Even sleet and darkness are not unwelcome to the traveller who rides through them at the gallop towards the hearth which his heart yearns to cheer. The moaning of the winter sea was dear to Maurice, because it told him he was nearing home ; for is not that our home where abide those we love ? The wind that swept the wave brought with its odour brightest memories. The level, treeless flats refreshed his eye more than the fairest landscape. It seems to the repining human heart that one has not many such journeys. Remembrance—the Ingrate—clings rather to the hasty summons to the sick-bed, or the travel across strange lands, every foot of which removes us further from those with whom we fain would stay. But most of us have

had experience of some white day of travel—every boy who returns from school for his first holidays has one—when all great nature's forces seem resolved to work us pleasure; and thus it was to-day with Maurice Glyn. The yellow fly—its unlovely hue much aggravated by the surrounding snow—seemed a sheriff's coach of splendour; that dreary uphill road the most picturesque of byways—only a little long. At the turning, Maurice left his invalid companion to be carried home, and took his way to the manor-house on foot. He sang, he whistled; like Mercury, he seemed to have wings about his ankles, and was inclined to fly rather than walk. He had written about all else to Kate, save the finding of the will: it was only yesterday that matters (subject, of course, to her approval) had been finally arranged with Sir Richard; that was the good news he had to tell her. There was no occasion

for her to sell her translations, and there would be no difficulty in her purchasing a sewing-machine—or seven shopsful of them, if such was her pleasure. The carpet bag he carried in his hand almost without knowing it (except when he threw it up into the air, and caught it deftly), was full of certain documents, which would convince the most sceptical. But she would believe his word. O yes. Her trust was fixed most firmly in her professional adviser. At which idea, Maurice laughed aloud.

Madam and Kate were in the breakfast-parlour, which they used in cold weather in preference to the large drawing-room. The old lady welcomed him with both hands; Kate with one.

“Well, I never!” exclaimed Madam, scandalised by this coldness of demeanour. “Why don’t you give him a kiss?”

Blushing scarlet, Kate presented her

cheek at this reproof, and Maurice touched it with his lips.

"That was not the way your poor father used to greet *me*, when we were engaged to be married, and had been away from one another a whole month," observed Mrs. Irby. "I call it very unsatisfactory."

"Shall I do it again?" inquired Maurice, demurely.

"Not for *my* sake, Mr. Glyn, certainly not," answered the old lady, laughing. "Well, a laggard lover makes, I daresay, an all the better man of business.—Poor Mr. Crozley is almost out of his mind with what he calls my rashness. Now, what have you done with all my money, sir?"

"I have invested it in the manner I suggested, my dear Madam. I will answer for it, your income will be henceforth at least double what it used to be."

"Goodness me! Is it possible?—Not that I see why you should show such a

long face about it, Kate. I am sure we ought to feel very much obliged to Mr. Glyn, and I am sure there is no great risk, or he would not have run it."

"There is no risk at all," said Maurice, quietly. "But in return for that excellent arrangement, dear Mrs. Irby, I must ask for a few minutes alone with Kate here."

She was growing very pale, and he saw that she had the greatest difficulty to maintain her calmness.

"Be of good courage, dear girl," whispered he, taking his seat beside her, as her mother left the room: "I am not unnecessarily cruel, as you think. Your mother's money is quite safe. There is neither shame nor poverty before you now. I bring the best of news: what I hoped for, when last I parted from you, has come to pass."

"Neither shame nor poverty?" murmured Kate, faintly, like one in a dream. "My mother's money safe? Have you

not, then, settled with the insurance companies?"

"Yes, Kate, yes. Here is the deed of acquittance: see they promise to molest us no further."

"For the consideration of ten thousand pounds? What does this mean, Maurice? *Ten* thousand; why, we have only *five*: You have advanced the other five yourself. You have beggared yourself for us." She rose from the couch trembling excessively. "I will not have it done."

"It *is* done, dear Kate. But then I knew you would pay me back again, you see. That was the point I was coming to. You are a rich woman—a will has been found—you are your godfather's—Sir Nicholas's heiress, after all."

And he told her his good news—without a word to mar it, of her cousin's crime, her father's cunning stratagem.

"Why, Maurice, I can pay the whole sum

now which we wrongfully acquired: ten thousand pounds would now repay the companies for all their loss—wipe out the blot upon my father's memory ! ”

“ Without doubt it would. Pay it; and if they do not cast a statue of you in pure gold, and set it up in their board-rooms, they are a niggardly lot.”

“ I can repay *them*, Mr. Glyn—and I thank Heaven for it—but how can I repay *you* ? ”

“ Easily: you will have lots of money to spare still.”

“ Oh, sir, I was not thinking of mere money. That five thousand pounds of yours was not advanced with the idea of repayment. Before you learned of the existence of this will, you had made this arrangement with the companies, although you are now striving to hide your goodness.”

“ Still, I suppose you *will* repay me,” chuckled Maurice: “ you are not going to

ride off upon the shabby ground, that I did not expect it, and therefore it don't matter. Then you must replace your mother's money; or stay, it will be better fun to give her ten per cent. for it, so that she will not lose her confidence in your humble servant. And besides that, I'm going to ask for some more for somebody else (I take advantage, you see, of my heiress while she is overwhelmed by her good-fortune, and ready to give everything to everybody): I want you to buy the advowson of Blondel Parva, and to present it to Mr. Milton when the time comes."

"By all means, dear Mr. Glyn. But you have asked nothing for yourself—you to whom I am indebted for all."

"Money can never repay me," observed Maurice, with affected gloom.

"Alas, no!" sighed Kate; "indeed, it cannot."

"And yet, if I had it *all*," mused he,

comically, "subject to these little deductions, then I think I should be satisfied. Won't you give it me *all*, dear Kate, and yourself into the bargain?"

"Mr. Glyn—Maurice," sobbed the girl, hysterically, "you know that cannot be. You promised never to think of such a thing again. It was settled so between us."

"Excuse me, my dear Kate ; I happen to remember the very words of the agreement ; and the words, I do assure you, upon my professional reputation, are everything. You said that you would never taint my name by sharing it, and I answered that you never should—because (this was a mental reservation of my own) you never *could*. There is no real shame without blame. Moreover, when I parted from you on that occasion, I remarked : ' Well, at all events,' (that was when you wouldn't kiss me,) ' you will not grudge me your hand : ' and you did not ; you gave it to me, and I've got it now, and

I mean to keep it." And he gave that little hand a loving squeeze. "Your glove, dear Kate, I return to you, having done my duty, I trust, as your true knight: he who has the substance does not value the shadow.—Don't speak, darling, if it distresses you, I beg. The silence which gives consent is golden; and everything is very nice as it is."

"Well, upon my word!" ejaculated Madam, who, after repeated but unnoticed knockings at the door, had ventured to intrude herself, "I am sure I blamed you for your reserve just now, Mr. Maurice Glyn, with great injustice; or rather, you seem to me to be making up for previous omissions."

"Yes, my dear Madam, that is so," returned Maurice, coolly. "There were considerable back-payments owing; the principal had to be repaid with compound interest. I am an authority upon all these

matters, you know, in spite of what Mr. Crozley says."

"At all events, Kate seems to submit to it with a very good grace, Maurice." (This was the first time Madam had called him Maurice; she was punctilious, after her fashion, about that sort of familiarity.)—"My darling," (this to her daughter, with a tenderness that is not to be expressed by words,) "are you happy?"

"Yes, mamma," answered Kate, smiling brightly through her tears.

"That is the best news I have had for many a day; for Kate," said Madam, gravely, "has not been happy, sir, this long time. Young people that love one another should not be so much kept apart."

"My sentiments exactly, my dear Madam," returned Maurice, ecstatically. "But stay; you are not yet aware that, in welcoming so humble a son-in-law, you are throwing away upon him a great heiress—a young woman

that might have done a great deal better than connect herself with Grub Street. A party—yes, a party worth eight thousand a year!”

“It’s quite true, mamma,” said Kate, quietly, as her mother looked in perplexity from one to the other. “Sir Nicholas’s first will has been found, and I am his heiress.”

“And your cousin Richard declared to me that his uncle tore it up before your father’s eyes!” exclaimed the old lady. “But then, I do believe that that young man would say anything.”

“Ay, and swear to it,” added Maurice, hastily. “Be sure that you never believe him even on his oath.”

“Dear, dear,” exclaimed the old lady, fanning herself with her plump hand, “I’m quite in a flutter! Please to tell me all about it, children, word for word.”

So Maurice told her, not indeed “word for



word," but so much as was good for her to know, of all that had happened.

"If my daughter had eighty thousand a year instead of eight, I had still rather she married you than any man in the world, Maurice Glyn," was her remark when he had concluded. And, moreover, *she kissed him.*

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CURATE CONSENTS TO STAY.

“You are all mystery, Maurice,” said the curate, peevishly. “I protest that having you in the house is like receiving the Sphinx upon a visit. You had nothing for me last night but hints and inuendos, and you have only inuendos and hints for me this morning. I want to know the solid facts that justify your offensively high spirits.”

“Well, haven’t I told you I am going to be married?”

“Yes; but I knew that before; and when I offer to start hot-foot for the manor-house with my congratulations, I am requested to wait a little. Miss Kate will see me at the priory, forsooth, this afternoon! You are

not going to pic-nic there among the snow, I presume?"

"Well, you see, Kate is an heiress now——"

"Thank you for nothing: I had that news, remember, from old Watson, not from you. He had kept it bottled up so long in spite of himself that he absolutely frothed over with it; it was offered to all comers like ginger-beer, which, if not instantly poured out, is lost. He sat by his ingle dispensing it to all thirsty ears, and his wife snatched up her bonnet, and carried it through the village for gratuitous distribution."

"Well, being an heiress," said Maurice, smiling, "this young woman, you see, already begins to behave herself as such; has her little fancies and affectations; desires, for instance, to receive your good wishes in the same spot where you first introduced her to your humble servant. For my own part, I think it's rather pretty of

her; it has a certain touch of poetry about it."

"She will have a certain touch of rheumatism if she doesn't take care," grumbled the curate. "Mind, *I* don't sit down, whatever happens; but I'll be there, you may tell her, at three precisely, and I hope she'll be pretty punctual. So *au revoir*." And Maurice started for the manor.

"It's selfish of her," soliloquised the curate, "to ask me to come to a place she knows cannot be very agreeable to me,—which, indeed, is full of painful memories. Riches do, I have heard, blunt the feelings of those who possess them, and certainly the process seems to be a quick one. And yet I won't call her selfish neither; I have known Kate Irby do very unselfish things. It's a little thoughtless of her—that's all." And the poor curate sighed deeply.

Mr. Milton was punctual to the appointed time at the priory gate, which was opened

to him, to his great relief, by Maurice himself; neither Grange nor his daughter was visible, nor, indeed, was it usual for them to be at the ruins in that season.

"Kate is in the gate-house by the fire," said Glyn, "and wants to speak to you at once, Charley. I shall not be jealous."

The curate and Miss Irby had not seen much of one another during the late months; the latter's state of depression making her very indisposed for society of any kind; and Milton himself being disinclined for it, for the same reason. But each had a very honest respect and regard for the other.

"I congratulate you with all my heart, Miss Kate," said Milton, holding out both his hands. "I am delighted that all is settled happily — although, for my part, I never understood the obstacle — between you and Maurice. He has been my friend these many years; and I don't know a more sound-hearted man."

"Thank you kindly, dear Mr. Milton. I know that I am more fortunate than I deserve."

"I did not say *that*, my dear Miss Kate; but I do not think you could have chosen a better husband. As for your newly-acquired wealth, that is a small matter, with respect to happiness, as compared with the other: although I firmly believe that you will both make a good use of wealth."

"I hope so, Mr. Milton. We have as usual been already pleasing ourselves in the disposal of some of it, although I am sure, in this particular case, it was well laid out."

And she put a telegram into his hand.
The advowson is yours.

"What does that mean?" asked the curate, simply.

"We have bought back the advowson of Blondel Parva, which my father disposed

of; and you are to have the next presentation, Mr. Milton. I am sure it gives me almost as much pleasure as Maurice to think that we shall keep you here; for we shall not live at Anstey Court, but at the old place, because my mother loves it so dearly."

"Miss Kate," said the curate with emotion, "this is only like your generous self, and my dear friend Glyn. It is meant, I know, most kindly by you both. But—the fact is, I—I can't stay here. . Maurice knows why, and I thought, perhaps—since you were engaged, when men, I have heard, become like women in their inability to keep secrets—that he might have told you the reason."

"He did tell me, Mr. Milton; but not until last night; if he had been less reticent, I might have helped you earlier, perhaps. You must be our vicar, sir."

"My good Miss Kate, it is impossible."

"And you must marry Mary Grange."

"Nay, madam. Forgive me if I decline to speak upon this matter." The curate looked very white and proud.

"Nay, forgive *me*, if I persevere in speaking of it," returned Kate, earnestly. "Your argument is, that since Mary would not have you when you were a curate, and poor, you do not care to be accepted because you are a vicar and rich. I think you are quite right, so far, Mr. Milton. Only such was not the state of the case."

"I heard it from her own lips," groaned the curate.

"Yes; because it was dictated to her."

Milton shook his head.

"Not by her father; that is true; but by Maurice."

"By Maurice!" exclaimed Milton in astonishment.

"Yes, I am sorry to say, by *him*. The facts of the case are these. He had the



warmest affection for his friend, but he underrated that friend's love for another. He was convinced that your marriage with Mary would be the greatest misfortune for you both. He was deeply apprehensive of your uncle's wrath, and when it declared itself, he strove to save you from it by what he now considers very unwarrantable means. He went to Mary, and laid the matter before her—showed her how your social ruin would result from her engaging herself to you—pleaded, in fact, as though he had been retained as advocate upon your uncle's side. Mary, darling unselfish girl, resolved at once that she should never be the cause of your poverty. She determined to sacrifice her love for you to your supposed worldly interests. She could not bring herself to say: 'I do not love you;' and, besides, you would not have believed her. But she compelled herself to do a more hateful thing—a thing utterly abhorrent to

her guileless nature: she affected to have a mercenary object. (Fancy our dear Mary mercenary! What geese you men are, to be sure!) 'I will never marry a curate,' said she: and you believed her."

"I will never forgive Maurice Glyn!" exclaimed Milton, passionately.

"What, not forgive Maurice? Oh! but you will, though! Now look you, dear friend; he did it all with the best of intentions. He was not clever, but he meant well. Or, perhaps, he was a little over-clever—let us say *that* was it. It was his very affection for you, mind, that led him to be so absurdly strategic. Not only have I not the slightest sympathy with him in this matter, but I happen to know that if he had been in your case, he would have married Mary at all hazards. He is the least calculating of mortals where he himself is concerned: all impulse, no prudence. But I will say this for him, that



he would not have taken that 'I will never marry a curate' for real earnest. Maurice is not so easily denied, although so kind."

"He has seen me wretched, despairing—and never given me a grain of comfort, when he knew this all the time!" answered the curate.

"You are nursing your wrath to keep it warm," urged Kate, smiling. "That is not like a clergyman, my dear Mr. Milton, and far less a beneficed clergyman. You owe it to your future position, Mr. Vicar-elect, to set a better example. Well, if you won't listen to me, and good spiritual advice, I must hand you over to the secular arm.—Mary, don't you let him take one kiss until he has promised to forgive Mr. Glyn."

He turned, and beheld Mary standing in the doorway, white even against the snow without, but with a tender blush just budding

upon each cheek, which deepened as he gazed, from rose to carnation.

"Is this all true, dear Mary?" said he, flushing likewise.

"All quite true, Mr. Milton. That I would not let you suffer hurt on my account, should be surely laid entirely to my own credit. Do not then blame Mr. Glyn, but me."

"I will blame neither of you," said the curate, fondly, taking her fragile hand in his, and drawing her, towards him.—Where is friend Maurice?"

"I will go and fetch him," answered Kate; "unless," added she, smiling, "you two have any objection to be left to one another's company."

And after a reasonable delay, she fetched him, and a cordial reconciliation was effected.

Not on the most brilliant of its picnic days had the old ruin ever held four happier or more comely lovers. If like had chosen like,

Milton, the athlete, would have mated with round-limbed Kate ; Maurice, the slender, with the faylike Mary. But that is not the way that weddings go.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

THERE remains not very much to be told.

It may be sufficient to state of Richard Anstey, that, endeavouring to supplement his diminished income, by devoting himself more than ever to the pursuits of the turf, he was at first successful: he made a very pretty penny out of his most intimate associates and acquaintances; but your amateur in rascality (as in everything else), notwithstanding that he may let slip no opportunity, and entertain no scruple, has but little chance against the professional, and in the end our astute friend succumbed. With the wreck of his late winnings he is then said to have set up a betting-house, and issued



“lists” of the most attractive description ; but having given the odds too many times over against a certain favourite, who somehow escaped all the attentions in the way of “nobbling” and “making him safe” that were prepared for him, and won the Derby, Sir Richard was compelled to “bolt.” He is now passing his days at Baden-Baden, where his thousand a-year, paid quarterly—none of which is frittered away in satisfying his creditors—enables him, together with his title, to cut a very tolerable figure.

The Rev. Charles Milton was in a great hurry to compensate himself for the unjustifiable treatment to which he had been subjected, by immediate wedlock ; but Mary had promised Kate that their respective marriages should take place at the same time ; and the affairs of so great an heiress as the latter demanding some time for the lawyers to spin their webs about them, there

ensued an unavoidable delay. In the meantime, the superannuated vicar was so complacent as to die, and the curate was presented in due course to the vacant living. Now, no sooner was his uncle made aware of this great change in his nephew's fortunes—notwithstanding that the news was coupled with that of his approaching marriage with Mary—than he began to see that matter in quite a different light: what in the curate had seemed a shameful *mesalliance*, became in the incumbent, at the worst, an eccentric attachment. Finding, in short, that his countenance was in no way necessary to the young couple, he tendered it to them (as is the manner of his kind) full face.

Mary's presents from the manor-house, costly as they were, did not, in magnificence at least, surpass the gift which her unknown relative sent her down from town, and which he would have placed upon her neck with



his own hands, but that a fit of the gout (an aristocratic ailment in which he took no small pride) forbad his presence at the wedding. That event is so recent, that we cannot speak with certainty of the happiness of Charles Milton's married life ; but we have the utmost faith that he made an excellent choice. His blind father-in-law may seem an incumbrance to some folks, but (since Mary loves him so dearly) not to the vicar ; and, for our own parts, we know several mothers-in-law with eyes (and very sharp ones) that are to the full as objectionable.

It is not necessary to describe the weddings. Think, reader, of the most successful and charming event of the kind that lies within your experience, and then *double* it. The two brides—I really do not know which was the fairest—were a sight to make a poor bachelor wish—I don't say for marriage, but for bigamy.

This subject is too tremendous—too bound up also with existing interests—to be pursued.

Dear Madam made a remarkable observation to her daughter on that wedding morning.

“We cannot have *all* our wishes, darling, and I am sure I have much cause to be thankful; but I do wish that your poor father could have been alive, to know that you had won such a husband as dear Maurice.”

But she never knew that wish had been gratified; never dreamed that a certain grave in Kensal Green knits her daughter's heart to her husband almost as strongly as the tie of love itself.

Kate feels that what she had deemed the greatest misfortune of her life, has somehow worked for good; that all anomalies—all that seemed so hard and unjust—in her lot are reconciled at last;



nor does she any longer doubt that, in the eyes of Maurice Glyn, she has brought with her to his bosom as little Shame as Blame.

THE END.



